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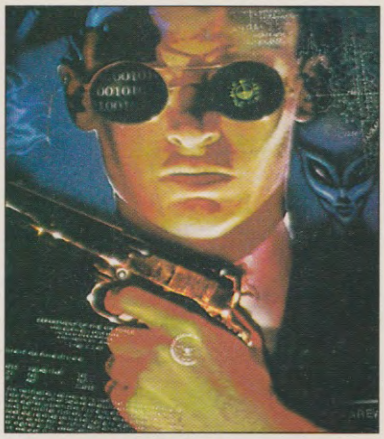

The closest thing to an *X-Files* RPG , and it's absolutely brilliant!

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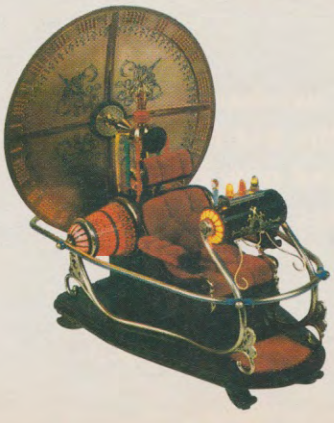

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Future PUBLISHING

This issue would have been impossible without...
wine gums
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **late post**

UP FRONT

When I was 12 a friend at school introduced me to a brand-new game called *Dungeons & Dragons*. I remember my first ever session – I was a fighter in a band of six or so adventurers, and we spent a couple of hours orchestrating a single scrap with a load of dead guys. I didn't have a clue what was going on, so I rolled the dice when told and made an effort to look like I was having the time of my life.

That was 13 years ago. Since then I've played more games than I could possibly recall, I've attended conventions, I've edited a fanzine and now, after years in the computer magazine industry, I've been given the job of following in Steve Faragher's footsteps as the editor of **arcane**. It's a bloody marvellous feeling – I'm combining my hobby with my job.

I've got a lot to live up to. In the six issues that Steve's edited, **arcane** has gone from strength to strength. We've seen it develop in style and in pace, and this has been reflected in the number of people, both here in the UK and across the 'pond' in the States, who have been buying the mag. I intend to build upon **arcane**'s already excellent position, and make it even better.

A rash claim? Maybe, but yes, it can be done. Don't worry, I'm not going to be bringing in any sweeping changes – **arcane** will be staying pretty much the same way as it is now. But I will be implementing some ideas that you, the readers, have suggested through letters and e-mails over the past months. And, of course, I've got a fair few ideas of my own which I'll be throwing into the mix.

If you'd rather e-mail me than send letters through the post, my e-mail address is: pettengale@futurenet.co.uk Look forward to hearing from you soon.

We're always on the lookout for your submissions and feature ideas. If you've got a feature you think should appear in **arcane**, write a 500 word proposal and send it in, marked: Feature Proposals.

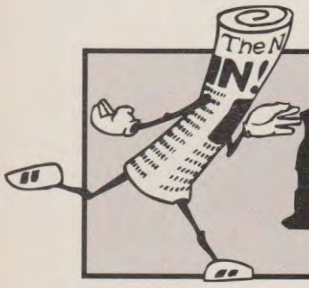
Illustration Simon Gurr

This issue, as I hope you'll agree, is a bit of a cracker. I've kicked off the features with a look at how you can bring horror into your roleplaying sessions, and I'm not just talking about campaigns and scenarios based on *Call of Cthulhu* (a personal favourite of mine) or *Vampire;* horror scenarios can breathe new life into games of all genres, as Paul White explains on page 22. Other features? Too many to go on about here (well, almost), though I would recommend you seek out our look at dealing with time travel in RPGs which starts on page 34, and I'm particularly proud of this month's Encounter (The Prison – find it on page 41).

So what, you may be thinking, has happened to Steve? Well, Steve's going to be continuing to have an influence on **arcane**, in his new-found capacity as Consultant Editor. What does that somewhat curious title mean? It means I'll be using Steve as a springboard for ideas, and he'll be continuing to write features and reviews for the mag (and with more time on his hands, he'll be spending more time on his RPG campaigns).

I want to get as much feedback from you on **arcane** as I can, whether good or bad, so I implore you, after you've finished reading this issue of **arcane**, let me know what you think. Jot down your thoughts and send them to: Paul Pettengale, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Cheers!

Paul Pettengale
Editor



DESPATCHES

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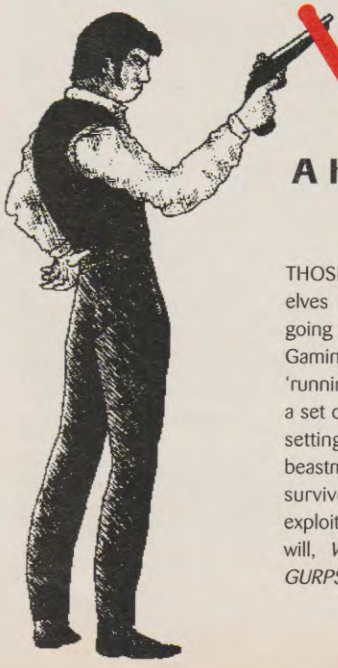
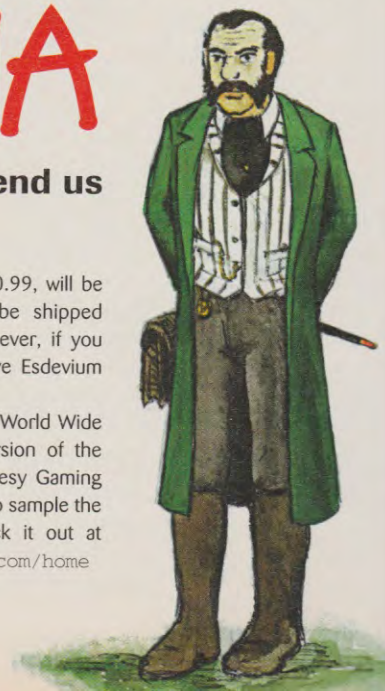


A home-brewed roleplaying system is set to send us back in time later in the year

THOSE OF YOU WHO are bored of fairies and elves may want to give a forthcoming system going by the name of *Victoriana* a try. Heresy Gaming, a small outfit which describes itself as, 'running on nicotine and tannin', has put together a set of rules for roleplaying in a fantasy Victorian setting where, 'Bolsheviks, nihilists, anarchist beastmen and gypsy halfling tinkers' struggle to survive under an oppressive regimé where exploitation and poverty are rife. Imagine, if you will, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* mixed with *GURPS Goblins* and you'd almost be there.

Victoriana, which is to cost £10.99, will be available mid-September and will be shipped through all the usual channels. However, if you want to place an advance order, give Esdevium Games a ring on 01252 26116.

And if you've got access to the World Wide Web, you can download a 'lite' version of the game (plain text only), from the Heresy Gaming web site. This will give you a chance to sample the game way before its release. Check it out at `http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/heresy`



Blood and Magic

More *AD&D* on the PC

The latest in the line of official *AD&D* computer games is *Blood & Magic*, the first release from Interplay since it acquired the *AD&D* license from TSR. *Blood & Magic* marks something of a departure from previous *AD&D* releases, most of which relied on a first-person three-dimensional view. Instead, the game is a real-time strategy affair, casting the player as a mage who must summon allies – warriors, wyversn, wraiths and company – to fight for him. The game consists of 25 individual missions in five mini-realms (all part of the *Forgotten Realms* universe). Each realm has a unique landscape – which affects the strategies you employ – and a variety of magical items. PC and Mac versions of *Blood & Magic* are due in the near future. We've also heard whispers of a *Dragon Dice*-based computer game – more on that as soon as we get some more information.

More strategy than roleplay in the forthcoming *AD&D* computer game, *Blood & Magic*, planned for release later in the summer.

Behind the lies?

New Millennium Entertainment has big plans for its first roleplaying game...

One of the best new games of the year, what makes *Conspiracy X* even more impressive is that it's New Millennium Entertainment's first roleplaying system. Luckily, though, it's not going to suffer from the lack of support that has doomed so many releases from smaller companies – NME is already hard at work on several supplements.

First up comes a referee's screen, which as well as having all the relevant charts and tables and other stuff you'd expect, will also feature a 48-page adventure booklet, including a pre-generated team of Aegis operatives and full details of their base. Following this will be the *Aegis Handbook*, due at the end of June. The first major supplement for the game, the *Handbook* takes a detailed look at Aegis, its history and its organisation. Expanded rules for recruitment will allow for new backgrounds, character traits, psychic powers and nifty equipment, and the book will also include discussions and advice for characters on combat, cover-ups, and many other aspects of an Aegis operative's life.

For the second half of the year NME has at least three more supplements in the works – *The Grays Sourcebook*, *The Supernatural Sourcebook* and *The Black Book*, each of which will expose more of the secrets of the *Conspiracy X* world. A book about corporations (you didn't think that the government was the only organisation with things to hide, did you?) and angels (yes, angels) are also possible, although neither has been confirmed as yet.

Check out our review of *Conspiracy X* on page 56.

And besides...

A fantastic day

If you're quick off the mark you'll be able to make it to TSR's latest Fantasy Day (taking place at the Corn Exchange Shopping Centre in Leeds on 18th May, a day after **arcane** 7's publication). A team of players will descend on the shopping centre to demonstrate to all the thrills of roleplaying, dice and card games. TSR are planning to storm more shopping centres across the country throughout the year.

The war is over

The long-running court battle between FASA and Playmates has ended. FASA sued Playmates in 1993 for copyright and trade dress infringement and unfair competition, feeling that Playmates' *ExoSquad* toys were uncomfortably similar to FASA's *BattleTech* Mechs. The court ruled that the 'general impression of similarity' was insufficient to warrant an award of damages, while also rejecting Playmates' counter claim that FASA's Mech designs were not protectable because they were ideas common to the games industry.

On the subject of FASA and legal battles, arcane must apologise to the company: we stated in issue 5 that FASA was involved in a dispute with the Bandai Corporation. This is, and never was true. Sorry to all parties involved.

Vault re-opened

The horror game *The Whispering Vault* has been acquired by newly established company Ronin Publishing. *The Whispering Vault* was originally published by Pariah Press, and was nominated for Best New RPG in the 1994 Origins Awards. Boston-based Ronin, whose team includes one of *Vault*'s creators, will be supporting and expanding the game. They plan to shortly release two supporting supplements: *Mortal Magic* and *The Book of Hunts*. Look out for reviews as soon as we can lay our hands on them.

Steve Jackson flat out

Innovative new binding technology means that Steve Jackson Games, purveyor of the *GURPS Universal Roleplaying System*, is now able to release its rule books in a handy stay-open-at-the-page-you-want format. And you won't have to break their spines to do it. *GURPS Martial Arts, 2nd Edition* and *Car Wars Compendium, 2nd Edition* have both benefited from the new binding already, with more to follow.

Conventions

You are not alone. There are many tens of thousands of gamers all around the country, and they're forever meeting up to at these convention thingies to discuss the fine arts of roleplaying, board and wargaming, card playing, dice rolling... to see and try out the latest releases, and to pick up new and second-hand bargains. Here's a list of the main events taking place over the next few months. Don't you think it's about time you took part?

Convention diary

18th May Fantasy Games Day
Play and see demos of TSR games Corn Exchange, Leeds. ***Contact TSR*** **01223 212517**

18-19th May Beer 'n' Pretzels Games Weekend
Burton-on-Trent. ***Contact Phil Bootherstone,*** *99/99 Horninglow St, Burton-on-Trent, Staffs DE14 1PJ,* **01283 511293**

25-27th May Great British Games Festival
All aspects of gaming. *Old Ship Hotel, Brighton.* ***Contact SFCP,*** *42 Wyndale Rd, London E18 1DX.* **0171 358 1613** email: gbgf@sfcp.co.uk

5-7th July Ambercon UK
Amber diceless roleplaying. *Hilton National, Croydon.* ***Contact Simone Cooper*** *4 The Beeches, 193 Boston Rd, Hanwell, London W7 2JU,* email: simone@wyrdrune.demon.co.uk

6-7th July Games Workshop 1996 Grand Tournament
Leicester University **Contact Games Workshop 1996 Grand Tournament,** *Games Workshop Mail Order, Chewton Street, Hilltop, Eastwood, Nottingham NG16 3HY* **01773 713213**

12-14th July StabCon 96
Woolton Hall, Fallowfield, Manchester ***Contact Stabcon,*** *17 Davenport Park Rd, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 6JU,* email: hammy@riverbank.win-uk.net

continued opposite

More war and devilry

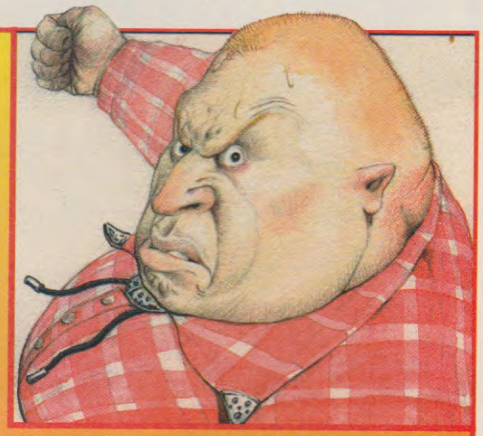
Warcraft II players eager for more killing, blood, gore and veins in their teeth will be delighted to hear of *Beyond the Dark Portal*, an expansion CD-ROM that provides many more opportunities for violence. Costing £19.99, *Beyond the Dark Portal* features 24 new scenarios, two storylines,

more than 50 maps – including a new terrain type for the Orcish swamplands – three-dimensional cinematics, legendary hero characters and speech.

Warcraft's makers Blizzard Entertainment have an entirely new PC game slated for release in June. *Diablo* is an isometric-view adventure that sets the players (plural, because it is a multiplayer on-line experience that should give *Ultima On-line* a run for its money) on a quest for vengeance. Your search for the murderers of your family leads you to an underground labyrinth populated by evil creatures and Diablo himself. A random level generator conjures up rooms and corridors as you progress – an approach that hasn't been used in computer RPGs for some time. Sounds intriguing.

Seymour J Clancy III's great outing

Just when it seemed that Seymour was having some measure of success in his 'crewsade' against gaming celebs...



It's a rock 'n' roll daLMation! Assuming mah disguise as a mahld-mannered English tea-boy, ah have infiltrated mah-sayelf into the core of the cacophonous Canadian combo that is The Dream Warriors, who-em ah fahnd are pardy to the shameless shenanigans and dodecahedral-dice doings that are the dreamed-up, DIY dining-room dramatics of DRUIDS & DRUG-ADDICTS.

An article in the magazine that is *The Face* and numersome promotional videos of this modern musical group all feature giant multi-sided dice of the kind KNOWN to cause our children to become INSANE MOTHER-MURDERING MANIACS because they are used in conjunction with the game that is DADDY-LONGLEGS & DARWINISM – in which, I unnerstand, crane flies do evolve into giant beasts of the esophagus and do devour all that hinders their passages.

Ah have never been so outrageous in mah lie-elf than bah coming to learn that more of my pop idols are turning from ELVIS and playing DIDGERIDOOS & DOO-WOP. Ah call 'em *rock 'n' roleplayers...* (*Snip* – Ed.)

Seymour is eternally grateful to Chris Birch of Kilburn for the tip-off on the Dream Warriors, and will reward him with an **arcane** T-shirt.

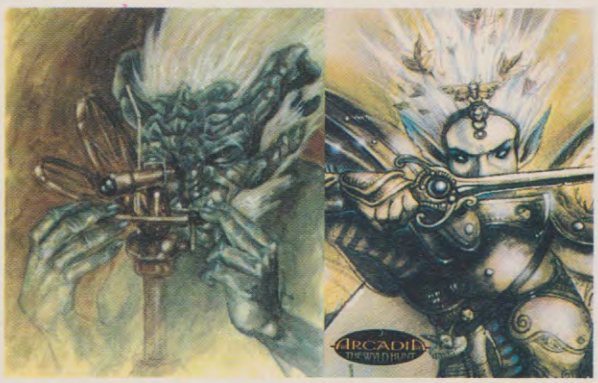
There's the same bounty for you if you have information that could help Seymour heap ridicule on famous roleplayers, even if they're not all that famous. But Led Zeppelin lyrics don't count – everyone talked like that in the 70s.

COMING SOON

The Wyld Hunt

The release date for White Wolf's *Arcadia: The Wyld Hunt* CCG is looming, with the latest news suggesting that August will be the month when this card game, based upon the company's *Changeling* roleplaying system, finally hits the shelves in the UK.

In an unusual move, there will be no *Arcadia* starter decks – the game will be playable with just a Character Booster and a Story Booster, with the rules all described on a single card. Players attempt to develop a character, who grows stronger and more experienced as the game progresses, by completing adventures, with the eventual goal of building a character strong enough to complete the Wyld Hunt itself. According to White Wolf there are 'thousands' of these adventures, all of which combine to create a unique game every time you play.



Even in a market full of lovely artwork, *Arcadia: The Wyld Hunt* seems set to be one of the best looking card games around.

As well as being a game in its own right, *Arcadia: The Wyld Hunt* will be of particular interest to fans of White Wolf's *World of Darkness* setting, as it takes the first detailed look at Arcadia itself, the long-hidden mystic homeland of the Changelings. Look out for more news as we get it, and a full **arcane** review soon.

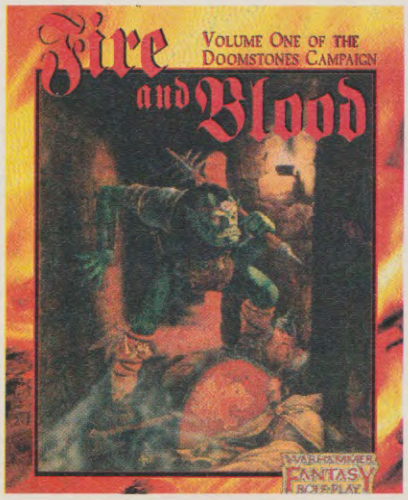
We're all doomed (again)

The biggest Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay campaign ever?

Doomstones, the gargantuan campaign adventure for *Warhammer FRP*, is to be re-released by Hogshead Publishing.

The adventure originally consisted of four parts: *Fire in the Mountains*, *Blood in Darkness*, *Death Rock* and *Dwarf Wars*. Hogshead are combining the first two into a single mammoth 176-page volume, *Fire and Blood*, which is to be released this month for around £14. The other two will be released as *Wars and Death* later in the year.

If you've already played through the campaign you'll be pleased to know that *Into the Chaos Wastes*, a fifth part planned by Flame Publications that never saw the light of day, is currently undergoing further development by Hogshead and should be out in 1997.



As if that wasn't enough to be getting on with, the London-based company are also working on a couple of new *Warhammer FRP* products: a GM's screen and *Realms of Sorcery*, the magic expansion that was originally mentioned ten years ago, when the *Warhammer* rules were first published. Both are due to hit the shelves later this year.

Conventions

13-14th July DrakCon 96
Roleplaying and CCGs with tournaments *Northern College of Education, Aberdeen* **Contact Sandy Douglas,** *5 Cottage Brae, Nellfield Place, Aberdeen, Scotland AB1 6DG,* email: ncect6@rmplc.co.uk, web: www.drakcon.wintermute.co.uk/drakcon

13-14th July Battlemasters IV
Roleplaying, CCGs, board and wargames *The Carlton Suite, Hagley Rd, Birmingham Contact EuroLoG, 46 High St, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 5LH,* **01227 741624**

19-21st July Convulsion 3D
Roleplaying with tournaments *Stamford Hall, Leicester* **Contact David Hall,** *Convulsion, 21 Stephenson Court, Osbourne Street, Slough, Berks SL1 1TN*

22nd September Spelbreker
Belgium's biggest gaming festival, now in its third year. Tickets 100bf. Contact: **Johan & Joachim François**, Wilhelmpark 7, 9900 Eeklo, Belgium, **+32 9 3781265, fax +32 9 3781370**, or: **De Media,** *Molenstraat 165, 9900 Eklo, Belgium,* **+32 9 3779394, fax: +32 9 3783678**, email: De Media@hookon.be, Web site: http://www.hookon.be/De Media

Just a quick note to let you know that **Euro Gen Con – *the roleplaying event of the year*** – will be taking place at *Loughborough University on 5-8th September.* They're taking bookings now. **01223 212517.**

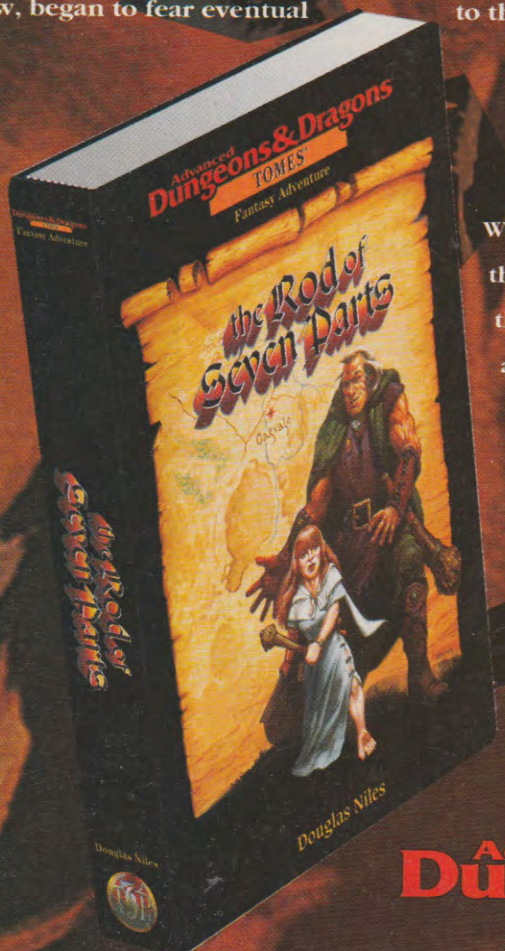
Are you running a convention in the coming months which isn't mentioned in this listing? If so, then let us know. We need to know what types of games the convention will be covering (RPGs, CCGs and the like), and if possible, which games specifically (*AD&D*, *Magic: The Gathering* etc, etc). We also need to know when and where the convention is to be held, whether there's an extrance fee, whether it's restricted by age, and anything else which you consider important. Send your convention details to:
arcane conventions listings, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BA.

There are seven

The Legend of the *Rod of Seven Parts*

Eons ago, Law and Chaos were locked in bloody war. Seeking advantage, the Queen of Chaos found in her consort a most terrible general, Miska the Wolf-Spider. Such was Miska's power that the Wind Dukes of Aaqa, guardians of Law, began to fear eventual defeat. In order to thwart Chaos' triumph, they bent their powers to form the ebony *Rod* and embodied it with the essence of Law. They gave the newly formed artifact to the Captains of Law and bade them vanquish their foes.

A fearsome battle raged for weeks, and the advantage shifted several times. Finally, the Captains surrounded the Wolf-Spider and drove the *Rod* through his body. There was a massive explosion, and the



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artifact shattered. Miska was thrown through a planar rip and vanished, his terrible scream and the foul blood left on the seven broken parts of the *Rod* the only reminder of his passing. The war was over. Chaos had not prevailed. And to seal Miska's banishment, the Wind Dukes spread the parts of the artifact to the corners of the world, that it never be whole again—or so the legend goes.

But parts of the *Rod* have resurfaced, and the Queen of Chaos is now questing to free her most vicious general and renew the bloody war between Law and Chaos. The legend is real. The danger is close. There is only one way to stop her—find the remaining parts first!

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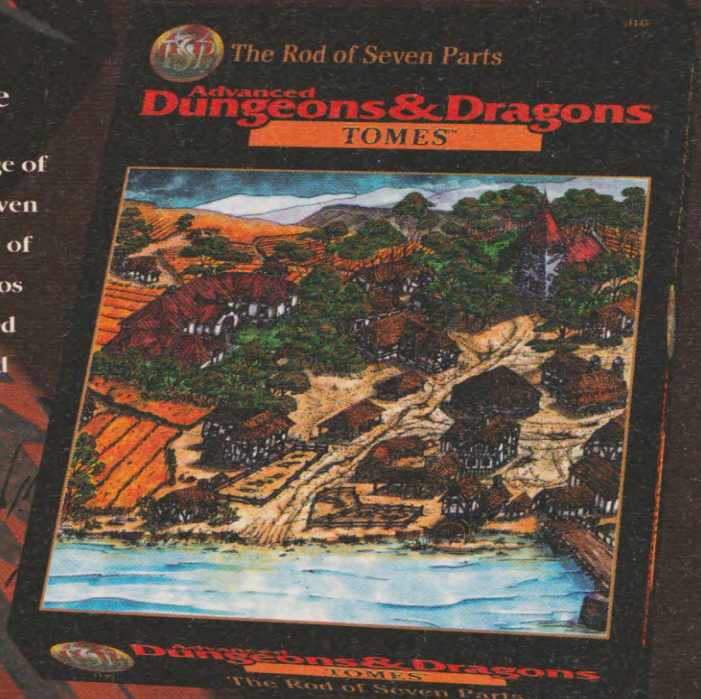

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CARD OF THE MONTH

Dramatic Pose

Keeping up appearances is important for all of us, but for superheroes it's essential. The Dramatic Pose card, from Aegis' *Wildstorms* superhero game, proves the point. Your opponent attacks, so what do you do? Find a nearby precipice, rip off your shirt and strike a pose, natch, and gain a defence bonus for demonstrating such unfailing style and stupidity under pressure. Thanks to Dan Hart of London for nominating such a quirky card.

So what's your favourite card? We're not looking for particularly powerful cards, neither do they have to be new or from one of the most popular CCGs. Just appealing.

Send your suggestions to: Card of the Month, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

Out of their tree

GAMES WORKSHOP® have some Elven models, and they're looking good. Following the recent unveiling of the *Wood Elf Army* supplement – the first *Warhammer* source book for nearly a year – Games Workshop have been in the grip of sylvan fever. The next release in the arboreal mould is the monstrous Forest Dragon, due on 27th May. It will repel all trespassers in the Wood Elves' sacred glades with its noxious halitosis attack, and will exact a toll of £25 for its services. Waywatcher scouts and Warhawk riders will arrive in June, with a model of an Elven sorceress on a Unicorn to follow.

40K players, meanwhile, are bracing themselves for the *Chaos Codex*, but that's still a couple of months away. June's major *40K* release will instead be the *Imperial Bastion*, the latest in a series of *Necromunda*-style cardboard building kits. The *Bastion*, which takes the form of a three-storey keep with a fortified wall, will be released on 3rd of June for £12.

Rather more exciting, if less immediate, is the news that Games Workshop model designers are working on a vehicle-sized Tyranid organism for *40K*. Whether this model is based on the existing *Epic* range or is an entirely new creature is unknown at the moment, as is the eventual release date.

Finally, Games Workshop scrape the bottom of the Necromundan barrel with the release of the down-and-out Scavvy gang, which will be available on the 20th of May.

Nyarlathotep lives!

Rumours are afoot of the possible re-release of what's largely regarded as the best campaign for *Call of Cthulhu* to date, namely the excellent *Masks of Nyarlathotep*. The boxed set was originally available in the early to mid-80s, and it may resurface later in the year.

The rumours were substantiated by the author, Lynn Willis, who posted a message to an Internet newsgroup in late April. "I'm working on it now," Lynn said. "It will include the Australian scenario, will have thumbnail portraits, updated stats and cross-links, a better matchbox, better plans... and a couple of new minor adventures." Here's looking forward to that one.

Video Nasties

The video is out there

Third in 20th Century Fox's series of special edition *X-Files* videos is *Abduction*, an everyday tale of alien kidnapping and government conspiracy. The video, which costs £13.99, features three episodes from season two of the series: *Duane Barry*, *Ascension* and *One Breath*.

In conjunction with the launch, 20th Century Home Entertainment are holding a 24-hour screening of season two in London on 1st to 2nd June. There are only 100 places – you can compete for yours by picking up an empty form from one of the 35 Playhouse stores around the country. Best get in there quick!

With more and more *X-Files* style roleplaying games appearing at the moment (there was the excellent *Don't Look Back* which **arcane** gave 8/10 to back in issue 5, and now we've reviewed the even better *Conspiracy X* – check out page 56 of this very issue to see what Andy thought of it), this video makes essential viewing for all referees running (or thinking of running) an alien abduction/conspiracy campaign. And the good news is that there's more *X-Files* coming to our screens soon, with the BBC showing the third series as part of its autumn season. Bet you just can't wait.

Good omens

The 6th June (that's the sixth of the sixth, 96, numerology nuts) is the 20th anniversary of the release of *The Omen*, the story of the rise of the Antichrist and his subsequent tiff with Our Lord and Saviour (not to mention the only film where you can see Patrick Trouton – aka the Second Doctor – speared by a church weather-vein). To mark the occasion, 20th Century Fox are releasing the original film and its two follow-ups – *Damien: Omen II* and *Omen III: The Final Conflict* – digitally re-mastered on video. Each costs £12.99, or you can get all three for £29.99 in a 20th Anniversary Collectors' Edition Boxset. Coo.

Dana gets a nasty shock in the new *X-Files* video from 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Gnoming me, gnoming you

To appear soon in the pages of **arcane**

Recognise this wee lass? No, that's not surprising really, because it's the first time you've seen her. You will, however be seeing a whole lot more of her, starting in the next issue of **arcane** when she and her gnome buddies encounter something 'orrible in a tea-pot.

arcane 8 sees the start of *Gnome World*, a comic strip of epic proportions, penned by Andy Lanning (of DC comics and Marvel fame), together with Dan Abnett (who wrote the hugely popular *Knights of Pendragon*) and Andrew Currie. It'll make you laugh. Honest.

Famous for 15 Minutes

AMERICANS ARE FUNNY PEOPLE, aren't they? We know this because we watch *Beavis and Butthead* on television and identify them with the archetypal American teenager, naturally assuming that everyone across the pond is like that. Except for the chicks, of course, who are cool.

Shane Horan of Antrim and Andy Townsend of Hastings watch the show as well, and write to tell us of the episode *Gifted Class*, in which a group of pupils are writing a story based on a swords-and-sorcery game. While the players describe their characters, there is mention of an enchanted staff, and Butthead says, "I have an enchanted long staff, huh huh," and proceeds to force two polyhedral dice up his nostrils.

We at **arcane** are not sure whether this is 'cool' or whether it 'sucks', and neither are we very sure whether we care a great deal either way, but we do know we have another fine roleplaying reference broadcast around the globe by television, so we'll settle for that. And Shane and Andy will get their T-shirts.

If you have ever seen our hobby illuminated in the public eye, we would like to hear from you. Write in to us at

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Wizards of the Coast is soon to release a special, limited edition set of *Magic: The Gathering* decks designed by top tournament winners. Only 2,000 of these 75 card decks will be available in the UK, but we've managed to swipe one – answer this question and it could be yours...

win! arcane COMPETITION in association with Wizards of the Coast

Q 'In what year was *Magic* first released on our unsuspecting world?'

Entries to 'That deck's mine!' **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW, or arcane@futurenet.co.uk

No Future or WotC employees, no multiple entries. The editor makes up the rest of the rules. Closing date is 30 June

MAGIC The Gathering

The big con

strap in here please

FROM 8TH TO 11TH October Milwaukee plays host to the largest games convention in the world. Sponsored by TSR, GenCon is expected to draw crowds 30,000 strong. It will feature 1,200 individual events, and will be graced with the presence of celebrities such as Garret Wang (*Star Trek Voyager*), Walter Koenig (*Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*), Joe Martin (Mr Boffo), Stephen R. Donaldson, Steve Swansweet (Lucasfilms) and many more artists, writers and game designers.

You'll have the opportunity to meet these luminaries, get autographs and sneak previews of upcoming projects, and participate in roleplaying, card, dice, strategy, military history, miniatures, computer, video and arcade games. And if you're in a spending mood, you'll find over 225 manufacturers prepared to sell you games, art, books, comics, jewelry, T-shirts and videos.

GenCon will also feature an art show, a costume contest, mediaeval magicians, jugglers, musicians, sword fighters, superheroes, Japanese animé, theatre, military seminars and competitions. Entry costs $15 per day ($10 for under 11s, while under 6s get in free) or $50 for all four days. You can get a discount by registering before 30 June. To register, contact GenCon Game Fair, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd, Lake Geneva, WI 53147 or e-mail tsrinc@aol.com

Meanwhile, EuroGenCon is all set for 5-8 September at Loughborough University. Special guests include artist Jeff Easley, Harold Johnson (*Dragonlance the Fifth Age*) and Bill Slavisek (*Dragon Dice*). For more info contact TSR UK 01223 212517.

COMPO WINNERS

Blue Magnet Sailor Chimp Yakuza 2026

One of the most popular **arcane** competitions so far, this one had loads of entries. These lucky winners were pulled out of a suitable container...

Winner: Miko Fanakura Smith of Colchester (crazy name, crazy chick), runners-up: Rob Barrett of Leamington Spa, Mohamed Boukiour of Kerkrade, Holland, Jonn Jeppson of Mörrum, Sweden, Deb Walker of Liverpool, and Paul Woolley of Pontypridd, Wales

COMING SOON

Kingdom O'Magic

Not all fantasy is dark, brooding and serious, as SCI's latest proves...

SALES CURVE Interactive's *Kingdom O'Magic* is a point-and-click computer adventure game that aims to parody traditional fantasy cliches.

Players take on the role of one of two characters (Shah-Ron, a spell caster, or Thidney the Snakeman, a fighter) and are presented with a choice of three quests to complete. The 'Traditional Quest' involves a frighteningly powerful Dark Lord and quite a few dragons, 'Magnificent 7/11' requires you to recruit a gang to defend a town against the invasion of an evil horde, and it's best not to ask about 'Slightly Bizarre and Twisted'. With locations like the elven woods of De-Lorean and the city of Minar Tragedy, you can see that the designers are determined to pack in as many naff puns as possible.

A strange bunch, these *Kingdom O'Magic* characters...

Kingdom O'Magic boasts 105 animated locations, 90 in-game characters (complete with 'Artifical Attitude'), and several arcade-style sub games. The PC version will cost £39.99 on CD-ROM, with Mac, Playstation and Sega Saturn versions to follow. Look for a full **arcane** review soon...

Here be dragons...

Titan Books is offering ten copies of Claremont and Bolton's classic *The Black Dragon* (see The Great Library, page 80), each signed by Joh Bolton himself, to **arcane** readers who know...

Q 'Who is the Queen of England in *The Black Dragon*?'

win! arcane COMPETITION in association with Titan Books

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No Future or Titan employees. No multiple entries or there'll be trouble

The editor's decision is final. Closing date is 30th June, 1996.

Get On Your Soapbox

Got something to say about gaming or gamers? Something that really bugs you, something that you feel really strongly about, or just something that you'd like to share with **arcane**'s readers? Then write it down in 750 words or so, and send it to...

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next month in arcane

it's Magic

And we're not talking about the card game. In **arcane** 8 we're conjuring up the definitive feature on magic in roleplaying games and fiction, examining how sorcery has been portrayed, and how you can successfully integrate it into your campaigns.

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RETRO

Golden Heroes

First published by Games Workshop in 1984 – now out of print

Forget dragons and oddly garbed wizards: in the early 80s, superheroes were in! Marvel was first on the scene, swiftly followed by DC, but then Games Workshop socked us with *Golden Heroes*. Tony Johnston dons his cape.

As was common for Games Workshop games at the time, *Golden Heroes* came in a box containing two rulebooks, a map and a sheet of cut-out cardboard miniatures.

The Combat section opens with the immortal line: "The eternal struggle between Good and Evil is symbolised in the world of comics by what is commonly known as a slugfest."

The appeal of superheroes isn't limited to comic collectors and film fans. *Everyone's* seen the TV version of *Batman*, we're all aware of the eternal struggle of good verses evil, and who of you can honestly say you've never wished you could fly? As a superhero you hold the fate of the universe in your hands, and with your great powers comes responsibility. The restrictions placed on superheroes are tight: do not kill, show mercy to your enemies, and fight fair. To be a hero requires courage, selflessness and a quick mind, aspects that can only be demonstrated through roleplaying, not a quick roll of the dice. And Games Workshop knew a thing or two about roleplaying (once).

Golden Heroes, Games Workshop's only ever superhero RPG, did its best to look like a comic; from the covers of the rulebooks to the hastily created (and often terribly named) characters that illustrated the rules, every element of the design clearly indicated the feel GW was after. And for those of us who thought we could do better than Marvel or DC, it was a godsend. Right from the word go there was something very defiant about it – the odd jargon broke away from the American conventions, and the creation of original characters (rather than re-hashed, familiar heroes) was encouraged.

Indeed, superhero creation was one of *Golden Heroes*' strongest points. A simple step-by-step process of four stats, randomly rolled superpowers and rationalising one's background. The random aspect of your powers often produced some bizarre combinations, but the player was encouraged to link them imaginatively rather than just discard any 'inconvenient' powers, and four pages of example rationales gave you a good head start when creating your own.

Combat was handled with the same expedience: a round consisted of four Frames (continuing the comic book feel), with some attacks and actions requiring more Frames than others to complete. Heroes and villains could act in all four Frames, whereas 'ordinary' folk could perform actions in three Frames at most. Attacks were extremely simple to perform

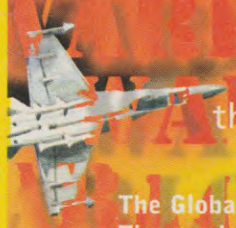
– a single roll on a D20 was all that was needed. It was neat, it was quick, and it re-created the feel of comics perfectly.

Golden Heroes used a great device for damage calculation and, again, it was designed in the comic book style… As well as a hit points equivalent, there was a secondary form of damage, Hit to Coma, which, when depleted, meant that a character was merely knocked out instead of killed.

In the handling of campaigns and character development *Golden Heroes* was equally accomplished. Each PC had three Campaign Ratings: Public Status, Detective Points and Personal Status. This innovative system gave you a tangible reflection on your character's actions: show mercy to villains and kiss babies on the streets and your Public Status would rise. On the other hand, if you speak in short, monosyllabic sentences, rarely socialise or adopt a defeatist attitude your Personal Status falls.

These three ratings could then be rolled against in appropriate situations. Low Public Status? Maybe the people throw rotten fruit at you while you try to stop a bank robbery. High Detective Points? Hey, you just happen to have a friend on the force who knows someone who… and so on. A superb system, and one which some referees I know still use today, adapted for other games.

Alas, *Golden Heroes* was dropped after a short while. Without the captive audience of an established comic book line, maybe GW decided it just wasn't worth the effort. Later in the decade, the popular comics themes changed too, marking the demise of the classic superhero and shattering any hope that *Golden Heroes* would be resurrected. But sometimes, on dark nights, you can still see the odd flowing cape atop Tower Bridge. Where did I put my tights?



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- Have Wizards call Dragons, and earthquakes down on your cousins.
- You receive a full game map every turn showing the forces of all the players and on most turns you will fight multiple battles.

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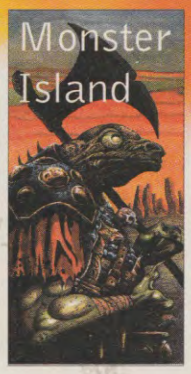

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COLUMN

But what's my motivation?

Is roleplaying more like acting, or more like storytelling? If we get the wrong answer to this question, we could end up missing the whole point of our hobby, and forget that we're supposed to be having some fun.

ANDREW RILSTONE

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

IT SEEMS THAT I AM 'a total pain in the dice pouch'. At any rate, that's how Mark Langford described me in the letter column of **arcane** 6. What have I done to receive this accolade? According to Mark I have – in my not-so-secret identity as editor of *Interactive Fantasy* – committed the unpardonable crime of saying that 'roleplaying is an intellectual exercise in performance art'.

I plead not guilty on all charges. I have never said anything of the kind. I don't think that roleplaying is an intellectual exercise: it's something we do for fun. And (as Lee Brimmicombe-Wood pointed out in **arcane** 5) it can't very well be a performance, since no-one is watching.

But, in the same article, Lee wrote that it was 'bleeding obvious' that the main point of roleplaying was telling stories – and it is there that I part company with him. Sure, an RPG which had no story – one in which absolutely nothing happened – would not be a whole lot of fun to play in.

But I do not play RPGs to tell stories. I don't play them to rediscover my mythic consciousness, or to confront and purge the Dark Side of my soul, either. The only thing which motivates me to play RPGs is that they give me the chance to pretend to be an imaginary person. Usually, my imaginary character goes off and gets involved in an interesting story. That's great. Once in a while he just sits in the bar and argues about the Will of Gods and the Cost of the Beer. That's great too. I roleplay in order to play a role. Surely that is as 'bleeding obvious' as anything can possibly be?

Of course roleplaying games aren't theatrical performances. When we get together to play *Ars Magica, Dungeons and Dragons* or *Pendragon,* we aren't doing something intellectual or artistic. We're doing something which most people outgrew before their tenth birthday: 'Pretending to be wizards'; 'playing knights in armour'.

For children, 'playing' is a very easy thing to do. Sling an old red anorak over your shoulders, and you *are* Superman. How many roleplayers identify strongly with 'Calvin and Hobbes' who regularly take trips to Mars and the Jurassic Era in their cardboard box? Now we are older and more sophisticated, we wouldn't find those sorts of games very convincing. This is why we write complicated rules and detailed worlds for our games. Our games of 'space men' pay attention to what we know about astronomy; we read about medieval history to improve our games of 'knights'. But if we ever forget that the object of the exercise is to 'play let's pretend' then we might as well not have bothered – we should have stuck to watching TV, reading a book or something equally mundane.

When I roleplay, I want to get engrossed in my character – to feel (in a way) that I really am Varos the Mighty, holding the gate in an heroic last stand against the legions of the snake cult. If that happens, then I call it a good game; if I don't, then I call it a total waste of an evening, and leave the campaign.

And this – I assume – is where the idea that I think that roleplaying is 'a sort of performance art' comes from. I do indeed think that roleplayers should take their characters pretty seriously: that they should try to believe in them as if they were real people. I do sometimes spend a minute or two before a gaming session trying to 'get into character'. I do think that players should think about their characters off-stage life – that they should be able to answer questions about their childhood, their girlfriend and their bedroom furniture. Will this turn your roleplaying group into the RSC? Of course not. But it does make it possible for us to believe in our character; to get caught up in the illusion of the game and to lose ourselves in these worlds we create. Which is the whole point.

I have (and I must stress, very, very occasionally) seen players get so caught up in their characters that they break down and cry during a sad bit, stamp about in anger when a character does something completely foolish, and even start to shake during a frightening bit. If you want to call this 'method acting' or 'performance roleplaying', then there's no way I can stop you.

But I would call it 'pretending': and it is about as pretentious, artistic, and intellectual as the average nine year old.

Tales of TERROR!

Horror scenarios shouldn't be limited to horror games alone, explains **Paul White** *– they can provide a thrilling new angle to roleplaying systems of any genre.*

"Then, after a long, dreary interval, and prefaced by a fresh creaking of stairs and corridor, there came that soft, damnably unmistakable sound which seemed like a malignant fulfilment of all my apprehensions. Without the least shadow of a doubt, the lock of my door was being tried – cautiously, furtively, tentatively – with a key."
– H.P. Lovecraft: *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*

Take note all completist *Call of Cthulhu* players: panophobia is the fear of everything!

We're going to tell you how to scare the Hell out of your players – how to make them squirm, how to make them shiver, how to make sure they don't sleep easy at night. "But I don't play horror games," you might be thinking, "so I'll just skip this article and read the reviews instead." After all, why would you be interested in generating horror in your average *AD&D* or *Cyberpunk 2020* game?

Because you want to get the most out of your game, to explore the potential of your campaign and provide stimulating, challenging and varied scenarios. That *is* what you want to do, right?

Don't think that all fantasy scenarios must revolve around some grand quest, all cyberpunk games begin with a visit from a bloke in mirror shades named Johnson, and all superheroes wear luminescent tights with matching cape. As a referee you should always be looking for exciting new directions and, although some systems and settings are better suited than others, almost any game can be enhanced by the occasional chilling scenario. (With the possible exception of *Toon*, of course.)

The most compelling reason for wanting to introduce horror scenarios into your campaign is to generate a high degree of emotional intensity. Sure, you can laugh at regular in-jokes, you can get angry at the villain over his blatant disregard for your heroic intent. Hell, some of you might even have shed a tear over the untimely demise of a favourite character, but nothing comes close to, or is as memorable as, the nail-biting, gut-wrenching, pants-wetting touch of the cold hand of fear. It's the ultimate indication of thorough suspension of disbelief, and is

"They'll realise how little they really know, and the horror begins"

immensely satisfying if you can pull it off. When you get right down to it, most of us like being scared (you watch horror films, right?) so maybe you should give serious thought to how you could integrate a little horror into your campaign.

Campaign vs Scenario

It is possible to run a horror scenario as a one-off, but it will lack the emotional attachment you can develop in an involved, ongoing campaign. Not only does a campaign allow players to get to know their characters and grow to care about what happens to them, it also gives them the opportunity to learn about the campaign world. And the more they learn about the world around them, the more they'll come to realise how little they really know, and that's how the horror begins.

The most important factor in developing an atmosphere conducive to horror gaming is controlling the pace of the campaign and the rate at which the players acquire information. Have NPCs who will only become significant much later make innocent cameo appearances, let the players meet characters you want them to feel compassion towards later. When players recognise shady NPCs from previous adventures, they will wonder if they are important. Let them wonder. Speculation fuels uncertainty.

You can also use news items, possibly hidden alongside reports relevant to the current scenario, or rumours overheard in a bar to make the players dimly aware of up-coming events – a visit by an enigmatic foreign dignitary, the exhibition of recently discovered artifacts, the emergence of a virulent disease, or controversial scientific research.

By advance introduction of future

Illustration by Paul Campion

"Horror fiction... shows us sights we would ordinarily look away from or reminds us of insights we might prefer not to admit we have. It makes us intimate with people we would cross the street to avoid. It shows us the monstrous and perhaps reveals that we are looking in a mirror. It tells us we are right to be afraid, or that we aren't afraid enough."
– Ramsey Campbell
(from the *Foreword to Horror: 100 Best Books*, edited by Stephen Jones and Kim Newman)

plot threads, you not only provide a rational link between seemingly disparate scenarios, creating the feeling of a real world where events happen outside the PCs' control, but more importantly you keep the players on their toes. The appearance of notorious individuals remembered from past encounters will immediately set the pulses racing and imaginations working overtime, as the players try to second-guess your next move. Stay one step ahead. Vary the style of your scenarios, even in a predominantly horror-genre game. Not all *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios should involve the mythos, or *any* supernatural elements for that matter. For something to be horrific, it must be unexpected, but more of that later.

One final thought on the integration of horrific elements into your campaign: be aware of how your players view you as referee, what they know of your style, and what (they think) they can predict in what you do. If you can evolve a reputation as the sort of referee who never gives too much away, avoids stereotypes (or uses them wisely), never uses creature statistics straight from the book, rarely does anything without a reason (albeit a cryptic one) and for whom things are rarely as straightforward as they seem, then your players will already be looking out for hidden clues, subtle hints and misleading information. They will automatically assume the worst in any situation where they are unsure, and a large part of your work is already done.

Written in Blood

What makes a thrilling horror scenario? It will contain the same basic plot elements as any other adventure: the initial hook, a mystery, enigma, or other means of engaging the players' attention; a combination of encounters, involving interaction with major and minor NPCs, action scenes, research and information gathering, clues and red herrings, building inexorably towards the denouement; and the final, dramatic confrontation.

What you need to do is think about how best to present these basic elements to generate tension, suspense and fear.

The easiest mistake to make is to overwhelm the players with horrific situations, so that every encounter involves battling blood-crazed vampires, exorcising tortured spirits or infiltrating sinister cults. If this sort of encounter becomes the norm, then you will no longer inspire fear and horror. The majority should be of a more mundane nature, although they might demand less straightforward explanations. When the horrific revelation comes along, it should always be something of a surprise.

There are two distinct styles of horror that you should consider for your scenarios. The first, and most simple, is visual horror. The players stumble across a badly mutilated corpse, torn apart as if by some creature of unnatural strength; the inhabitants of an entire village find their bodies decaying at an alarming rate, flesh dripping from their features like melting wax; a friend undergoes a terrible transformation into a half-man/half-insect right before their eyes. Use powerful images to shock and horrify the players, but don't overdo it.

Depending on your flair for extravagant description, and the strength of your players' stomachs, it is possible to conjure some pretty horrifying scenes. You can have the players witness people being eaten alive by killer ants, tortured to death by members of a demonist circle, or stalked and repeatedly attacked by a vengeful ghost. Read up on human anatomy; prey upon players' own claustrophobia, arachnophobia, fear of the dark and fear of being alone, and use blood – lots of it.

Players are a bloodthirsty lot, so you might find it difficult shocking them with purely visual horror. That is where psychological horror comes in.

Contrary to the cliché, it is not the unknown we fear most. We can't fear what we don't know. A small child holds no fear for us, even though it could be the devil himself in disguise. Fear is as much a product of the imagination as of the intellect, and the imagination needs a seed to give it life. We fear what we can't control, what we can't overcome, what we can't fully understand, but what we perceive as a threat to our fragile mortality.

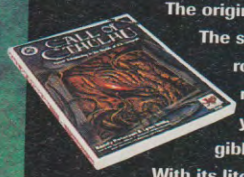
Consequently, the most powerful tool in the generation of horror is suggestion. That is why you have to carefully control the influx of horrific elements into your campaign. If you want to frighten players, give them something to think about.

And that's why it is particularly effective to have introduced certain scenario elements into the campaign prior

Masters of Fear

Just about any game can benefit from a horror scenario, but some are better-suited to tales of terror than others. Here are five games which lend themselves perfectly to the creation of horror scenarios:

Call of Cthulhu



The original and best horror RPG. The sanity rules provide many roleplaying possibilities, right up to the point where your character runs gibbering into the night. With its literary background, and Chaosium's consistently high standard of support products, you can't go far wrong.

Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay

GW's mediaeval dark fantasy is crying out for spine-chilling scenarios. Any fantasy campaign that includes ghosts, ghouls, and vampires can play host to a little horror, but *WFRP* positively demands it.

Shadowrun

The presence of the Awakened has populated the world of the 21st century with a number of creatures of darkness, but the true masters of fear have to be the corporations. Horror need not be supernatural in origin, and a megacorp can be every bit as sinister, and as dangerous, as Great Cthulhu himself.

Vampire – The Masquerade

The first of White Wolf's *World of Darkness* games. They have the advantage of a powerfully atmospheric campaign world, and WW's Storyteller system encourages innovative roleplaying and refereeing.

Earthdawn

Earthdawn's strength is the depth of its background, where mankind struggles against the 'horrors' that haunt the world of Barsaive. Scary stuff!

to the start of the adventure. The recognition and gradual realisation of some of the true significance of current events is at the heart of psychological horror. It creeps up on you, and by the time you realise the mess you're in, it's usually too late to escape unscathed.

Use incidents from the PCs' past from time to time. If you create a fascinating NPC who the players defeat, concoct a means of preserving him, possibly with an uncertain death where the body is never found, or a vengeful 'I'll be back', so you can use him again. Identifying the trademark of a particularly fearful nemesis – he always cuts off the left hand of his victim in imitation of his own missing appendage; or Tarot cards guide her murderous activities – should ignite fear and excitement in any player.

Whenever the PCs enter a new and potentially dangerous location, make sure they have a vague awareness of the type of danger that lurks behind the doors, so that they have something to occupy their minds as they open that creaking door. Then make full use of the environment to feed their over-active imaginations and fuel the tension that inevitably escalates throughout the encounter.

There is a very good reason why so many horror stories take place at night, in overcast or stormy weather, and in huge old houses or on ancient sites of arcane significance. Such situations stimulate our imaginations and they get us thinking dark thoughts. The absence of light, combined with labyrinthine corridors and confusing sounds from unseen sources blur our perception, ensure that we cannot rely on our senses, and ultimately make us afraid.

As players explore locations, assail their senses with grotesques such as arcane symbols, fearsome statues, walls that bleed, and paintings that cry, age, or alter their appearance. Strange sounds echo, though their true nature and source is disguised; footsteps approach a closed door; rafters creak; indistinct wails and moans that could be mere tricks of the wind echo all around; bestial snarls and howls can heard – any if these devices can be used to good effect. Strange musty smells that suggest great age; toxic gases that induce drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, memory loss or even hallucinations should be used too – the more senses you can cover, the better.

The possibilities for suggestive horror are virtually limitless, and it actually works. Once you get your players believing that there are forces at work they can neither see nor understand, the mere thought of entering an unlit room will alone send shivers down their spines.

Pulling the Strings

It doesn't matter how good a scenario you write if you make a botch of it in practice. The most important thing to develop in any horror scenario is the atmosphere, and while the content of the scenario does have a part to play in creating some of the necessary tension, it's the presentation that really sets the tone of the game session.

Pacing and timing are all important. When refereeing a horror scenario you probably talk less than in any other style of game. You want to provide the players with just enough information at just the right time to really stir their imaginative juices, and it's as much about what you don't say as what you do. Pause after giving significant information, allowing time for it to sink in, and make judicial use of silence. Let them stew, force them to speculate, meet their inquiries with a stony countenance, and make them reach their own conclusions.

Never give too much away. Normally you might err on the side of generosity, but in a horror game be reluctant to come to the PCs' aid. The players should be made all too aware of their characters' weakness and vulnerability in the face of supernatural opposition. The fear of death should hang over them as they uncover forbidden secrets.

A good horror scenario needs a memorable villain, one who is enigmatic, charismatic, and above all impossible to kill. Make your villains intriguing, and don't assume that all villains must be wholly evil. Detailed backgrounds, fractured psyches and complex motivations should make it difficult to readily identify the villain, at least initially. He might appear charming, wise, eccentric, perhaps vulnerable and in need of friendship. The idea of a sympathetic villain might not be easy to accept, but if you can capture a sense of weakness, of misfortune, that the villain too was once a victim, then you force players to confront difficult moral questions. Who can not feel sympathy for Frankenstein's creation, who did not ask to live, and yet was forced to come to terms with the horror of his own existence?

If you are looking for alternative methods of presenting your scenario, there are a number of techniques you can try to give the game a slightly different

Inspirational Horror

There is certainly no shortage of great material out there that can be used by any referee. Here are a few tips on where to look if you're stuck for ideas:

The Gothic Tradition

The modern horror story owes much to the likes of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker. Although often clichéd and predictable, and not always easy to read, the Gothics demonstrate the importance of architecture and scenery in creating an atmosphere for horror tales, which is what we're trying to achieve, after all.

The X-Files

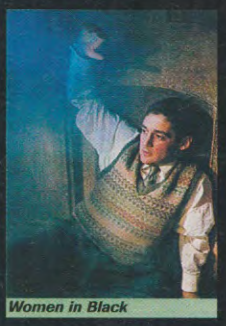
FBI agents Mulder and Scully's investigations into the paranormal show how fear and horror can be generated in a myriad of ways. Sure, the series deals with everything from ghosts and poltergeists to voodoo and devil-worshipping cults, but in its on-going UFO story-lines it also reveals how terrifying conspiracies and secrecy can be.

Jane Goldman's *The X-Files Book of the Unexplained, Vol 1* examines many of the themes from the series, and includes extensive bibliographical information.

Classic Horror

I find short stories particularly useful for ideas, and they're easier to read. Fans of HP Lovecraft should check out some of his favourite authors, including Edgar Allen Poe, A Machen and MR James.

Dorian Gray © moviestore collection


Women in Black

Also recommended are *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, and the West End play of Susan Hill's *Woman in Black*.

Alien

The ultimate sci-fi horror, it demonstrates graphically how to make the best possible use of the environment in which your story is set to create an appropriate atmosphere. It has everything: an awesome, barely-understood foe, a dark setting of narrow, labyrinthine passageways, a sense of utter isolation, and nowhere to hide.

Vlad the Impaler, 15th century ruler of Wallachia, was so named because he had his enemies impaled alive on spiked poles in his dining room.

"The term 'horror' is regarded by some as an unpleasant lowest-common-denominator word for the genre, hence the occasional search for something that sounds more respectable, such as 'dark fantasy', but some contrary writers glory in even less attractive terms, like the current 'splatterpunk'."
- *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, John Clute and Peter Nicholls

perspective. There may be times when the PC group becomes divided, and you want to make one player feel truly isolated. At this point you can make use of the other players, who are just waiting for their turn to come. Give each a minor NPC to play for the duration of the encounter, with brief coaching on how you would like them played. The remaining player will have no-one to turn to when things get hairy – you'll be amazed at how enthusiastically players will turn against their own.

Along similar lines, you might call for a pause in proceedings, possibly while the PCs sleep, to play out a scene from the past of one or more PCs. This flashback might involve some or all of the group, with anyone not involved taking the role of NPCs from that time. The flashback should have some cryptic relevance to the current scenario, and be stimulated by some relatively innocuous incident, such as sight of a picture, the first line of a song, or a distinctive accent or phrase that is reminiscent of the past.

Likewise, dream sequences, waking dreams, or visions that seem precognitive could be played out. You might provide a player with a glimpse of his character's impending demise, or he could witness an atrocity that will soon take place.

Frankenstien

If the PCs are researching historical sources and come across events that relate directly to their present predicament, you might have them replay those events even though none of them were present, possibly playing an ancestor or a famous historical figure. Inaccurate historical reports allow for some variation in events from those recorded, and you can allow the players to experience horror in an alternative lifetime.

All of these ideas, if used imaginatively and wisely, can add to the atmosphere of a horror scenario. What they don't cater for is the style of presentation. Because of the emphasis on creating the right atmosphere, you don't want to break up the flow of the game by constantly referencing rulebooks or character descriptions. It is essential that you are fully conversant with the basic rules of whatever game you're playing. Or, more importantly, that you know how to wing it convincingly. Know where your scenario is headed, and understand the personalities and motivations of your NPCs. Have confidence, and don't be afraid to improvise.

The Gothic Kitchen

It would be great if we could all use an old haunted house or gothic castle for our game sessions, but most of us have to make do with the humble kitchen or a similarly uninspiring location. But there are ways in which you can modify your gaming environment to make it more suitable for a horror game and enhance that creepy atmosphere.

Dim the lights. You need to be able to see character sheets, notes and the like, of course, but you can use table lamps or, better still, candles or oil lamps to provide an eerie half-light. Background music can also be effective, though you don't want to be stopping in the middle of a crucial scene to change the CD. Go for general atmospherics rather than matching pieces to particular scenes, and keep the volume low and unobtrusive. I recommend soundtrack albums, from movies such as *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, the *Hallowe'en* series and *The Crow*.

You could pre-record sound effects and play them at the right moments. Alternatively, enlist a willing accomplice to perform said noises, walk silently past a window, appear suddenly without warning, that sort of thing.

More standard ideas include using prepared handouts (coffee-stain your paper and burn the edges), maps, and other props such as hats and jewellery. Having players read texts and handouts, and decipher codes and old maps, has a more immediate effect than reading them aloud yourself, and they tend to take more notice if they have something visual to latch onto. Creating a history for an item can provide a useful focus, and a means of creating an authentic feel.

Before you record the soundtrack to your next game, waste all your coffee and pinch your parents antiques, be warned. These suggestions are just that: they are by no means essential, and can easily ruin atmosphere instead of enhancing it. Experiment with different means of presentation, but don't overdo it. Don't try too hard to create an authentic environment; roleplaying lives and thrives in the imagination, after all.

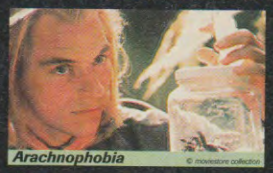
Your Worst Nightmare

A brief selection of encounters that you can use to set your players' pulses racing:

Raiders Of The Lost Ark

The swarm

The PCs are investigating an ancient system of catacombs, when one of them disturbs a nest of insects. They swarm over their victim, getting under clothing, in hair, ears, nose and mouth, hundreds of tiny bites peppering his flesh. With alarming speed, the insects spread, forcing the PCs to flee or be steadily eaten alive. And everywhere they turn, more of the insects appear. If you're feeling particularly cruel, then play on your players' own fears and phobias. (See James Herbert's *The Rats*, *Arachnophobia*, and the snake pit scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.)


Arachnophobia

Nowhere to run

PCs are passengers on a commercial spacecraft, which rumours suggest is also carrying a captured specimen of a recently discovered and dangerous alien race. While resting in their cabin, they hear the sound of frantic activity, blaster fire and panicked shouting, followed by blood-curdling screams and then silence. After a long pause, something thuds against their cabin door. It thuds again. And again. With all weapons stored in the cargo hold ten decks below, what would you do?

Nowhere Man

Alone against the world

Returning home from work out of town, the PCs discover that nobody seems to remember them and, even worse, no-one wants to know them. They are shunned, even attacked. They are no longer listed on any files or public records: no employers, no homes, no bank accounts, not even criminal records. There are no photographs, no recordings, no evidence that they ever were the people they claim to be. (see the series *Nowhere Man*).

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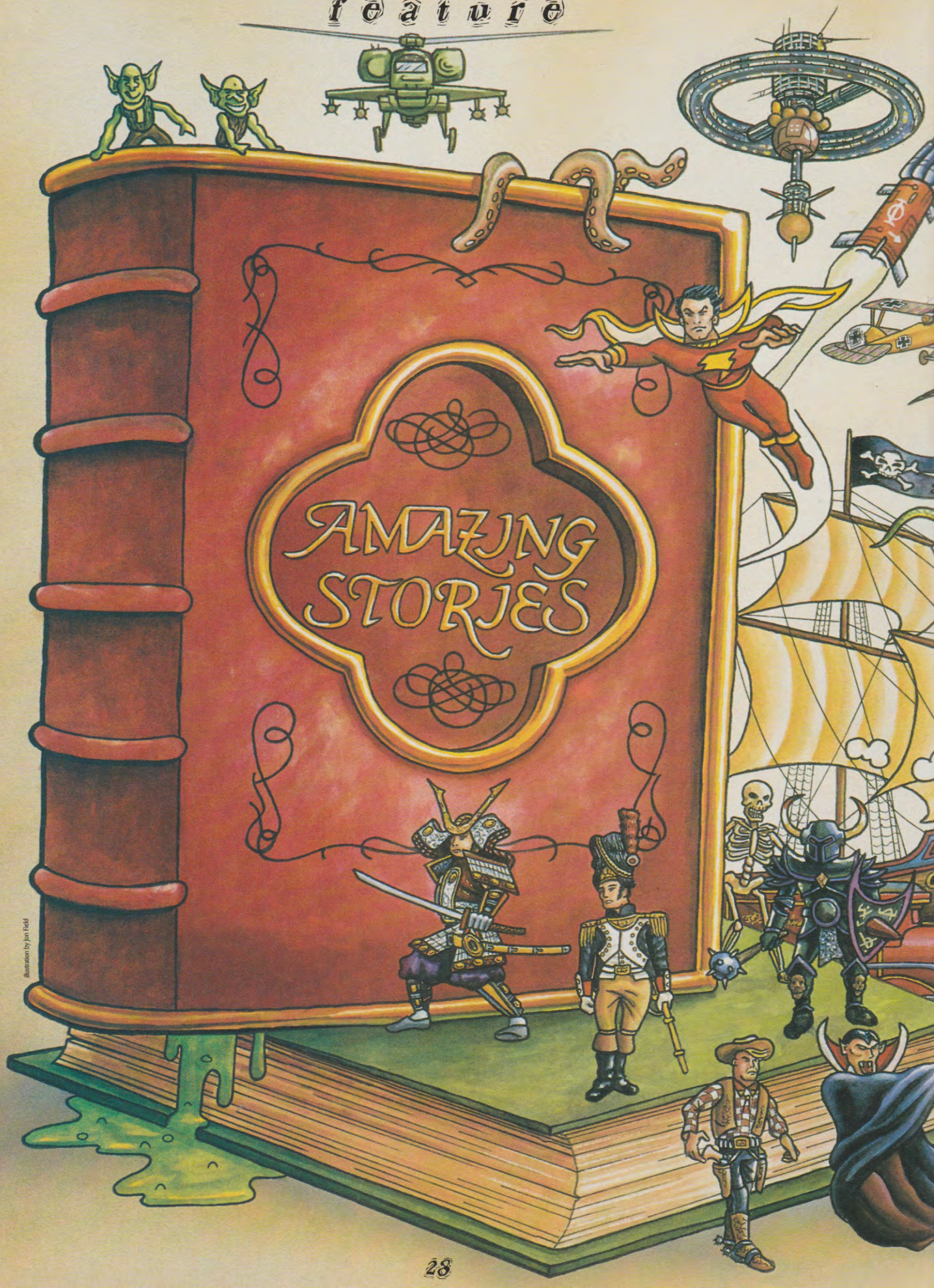


Illustration by Jon Field

DO IT YOURSELF PART 2: MODELLING BASIC SYSTEM MECHANICS

In the second installment of our four-part feature on how to write your own roleplaying game, Lee Brimmicombe-Wood explains how to tailor a rules system to the style of game you and your gaming group want to play.

YOU'VE GOT AN IDEA for the perfect roleplaying game, and now you're ready to start laying down a rules system. But just where do you start? The moment you've taken that step to systemise your game, you're in the business of creating models. Modelling is a science – but reduced to basics it means making hard decisions as to which elements of the game background need to be structured with a series of rules, and devising suitable systems to portray them. The initial task of defining the model and setting its parameters is the most important aspect of rules creation. It comes before the creation of any fancy game mechanics or charts or numbers; quite simply, you have to figure out what you want the end result to look like before you go any further down the road to game creation.

RESEARCHING YOUR GAME BACKGROUND

The first step in any modelling process is to do your research. You have to understand the game milieu thoroughly before you can begin to model it. If you're modelling Chinese martial arts movies, an obvious approach is to rent out some chop-sockey flicks on video. If you're systemising a book trilogy, a TV series or other media source, the same applies – read, watch and know your subject. If your game is to be based on a background of your own devising, you have to work hard to ensure that everything that's likely to appear in your campaign is going to be accounted for by a suitable rule or system.

Once your research is complete, take your source material apart, stripping it down to its component elements, and try to define the essentials. Look at the game's basic premises and examine approaches to modelling the background elements.

You'll probably find this is much easier than it sounds. For instance, if you're creating a system based on your favourite

It's always worth reality-checking your system at every stage. It can be embarrassing to find (as I did in a playtest of one system recently) that an average PC's flat out running speed is little more than walking pace, or that a flying spell is in fact slower than a crawl.

RULES-LIGHT OR RULES-HEAVY?

Rules-heavy systems have mechanics for almost every occasion. They are often highly detailed and take a long while to use, which can be an intrusion on play. A classic example of a rules-heavy system is ICE's *Rolemaster,* with its interminable Critical Hit tables and the such-like. The benefit of such systems is that they take control of the game away from the referee and make it less arbitrary. The classic roleplaying situation, where an important element of the game depends on the results of a single roll, is more likely to occur in a rules-heavy system. Rules-light systems, such Phage Press's *Amber,* on the other hand, rely far more on the referee's, rather than the rules', interpretation of events. The down-side is that you are abrogating control to the referee, which can sometimes be quite dissatisfying. However, this approach lends itself to a free-form style of play. It's less likely in a rules-light game that the mechanics are going to impose themselves too much on the narrative flow of the game.

The problem with short time scales is it makes roleplaying games quite intense. Because of the scales, fights are often highly lethal in comparison with the real thing. In a real-life fire-fight, for instance, soldiers can blast away for tens of minutes without causing a casualty. By comparison, roleplaying situations may present characters with firing opportunities every few seconds.

fantasy novels, you're likely to need mechanics to deal with melee combat. You should have a pretty good idea as to whether this combat needs to be portrayed realistically, or whether it should have a fast, 'swashbuckling' feel to it. This should help to define decisions early on in the design process. A more realistic combat system inevitably means it has to be more detailed, which means in turn that it will require in-depth game mechanics to regulate the combat and the effects of damage. A swashbuckling-style combat system would be weighed down by a mechanics-heavy system, so there you should opt to have a system that's lighter, more free-wheeling, and places more emphasis on referee and player interpretation.

In addition to a combat system, our hypothetical fantasy game may also include magic. Decisions must be made about how to handle this, depending on your interpretation of how magic works. Does it work by defined spells (in which case you're going to have to create spell lists)? Or do you want the magic to be more user-defined, and more free-form in nature (in which case you're going to have to develop mechanics for limiting magic)?

Core Rules

Many roleplaying systems rely on a 'core rule', the concept being that there is a simple game mechanic which unifies all the elements of the game. The same game mechanic is used if the player rolls for a skill, or against an attribute, or in combat. *GURPS*, for instance, uses the core rule of rolling beneath an attribute or skill figure to determine success, with a simple mechanic for handling opposed rolls.

Core rules are elegant, and mean the players don't have to memorise too many different rules. However, the problem with core rules is that in applying the same mechanism to everything, from swinging a sword to singing a song, the mechanic may not satisfactorily represent how 'reality' works. A roll beneath a skill number may be a good way of determining whether a PC hit a target with a gun, but it may not be the best method of measuring how much that character knows about, say, a science subject. Designers may wish to consider using different mechanics for different skills, particularly knowledge-based, or artistic ones.

Replicating reality through abstraction

Other campaign backgrounds may suggest other approaches to the game mechanics. For instance, a science-fiction game may require a skill system so players can interact with their technologies, but a science-fiction comedy, animé, or 'pulp', space opera campaign may need no skills at all beyond a catch-all, 'Tech' attribute.

"You should have a pretty good idea whether a combat system needs to be portrayed realistically."

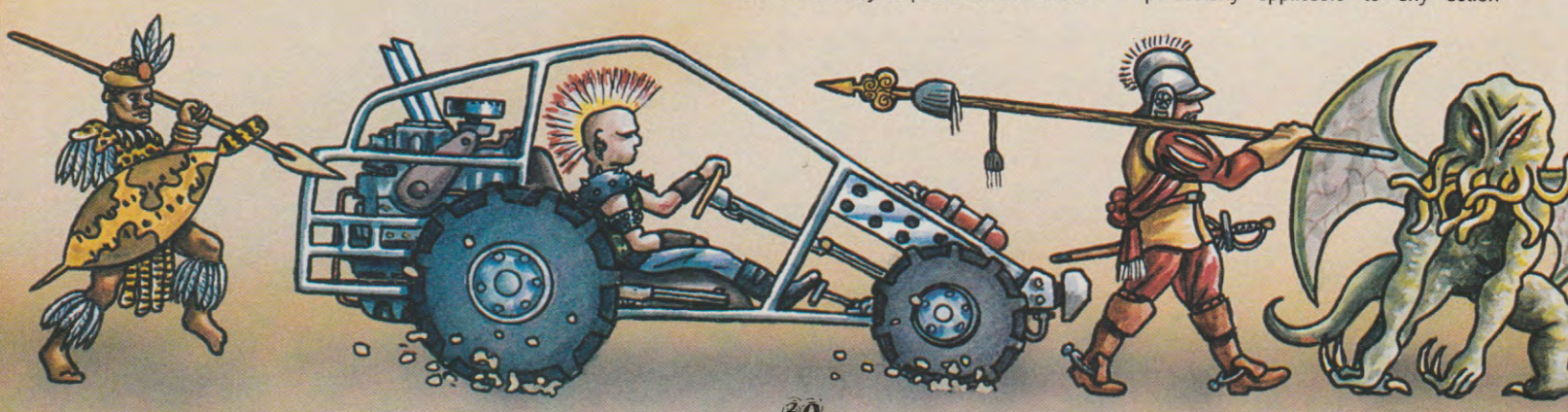
From an analysis of the background material, a whole range of issues may become apparent and choices presented to the designer. Is the system dice-based or diceless? Does it require a skill resolution system, in which case what are the skills, and where do they overlap with attributes? Do you even bother with an attribute system? And how lethal should the combat system be?

There are no hard and fast rules about the decisions you make at this drawing-board stage; any of them can be valid as design decisions. However, it's always worth keeping in mind the people who are going to play your game. If you come up with fancy ideas for systems or game mechanics, you must ensure that your players are going to be able to deal with them.

In roleplaying games, players must be able to make associations between abstract game mechanics and the 'real' actions of their characters, and it's important you make this as easy as possible. You should define the 'reality' the characters and the game world is portraying, in a manner the players can easily comprehend. You must provide mechanics which are consistent with that reality. In a Chinese martial arts campaign which is done 'realistically', characters can beat the Hell out of each other with their fists, and are also vulnerable to enemies with weapons. However, in a campaign run along the lines of a Tsui Hark movie, players should be able to parry swords with their fists and catch bullets with their teeth. In both cases, the associative element must be defined and fully realised at the design stage.

The biggest problem designers encounter with this associative element of game creation is reconciling the game reality with the players' objective perception of reality. In real life, a person who falls 100 feet will probably die, or be crippled. However, in some game 'realities' player characters can survive such falls, through the use of a skill or an ability. Whatever, you as the designer of the game must be aware of the extent to which your design stretches perceived reality. If a player character pushes a NPC off the top of a building, expecting them to die, the player may be extremely upset if your mechanics don't, without very good reason, result in a fatality. Similarly, if the mechanics don't permit a point-blank, head-shot with a large calibre pistol to kill the target 99 per cent of the time, then players are rightly going to get pretty pissed off. Steve Jackson's classic Murphy's Rules cartoons are packed with examples where the associative element is skewed, and mechanics don't fit perceived reality – check them out in the *GURPS* rules.

An important tool in establishing the associative element is scaling. This is particularly applicable to any action-



Dice Versus Diceless?

Do you wish to include random factors in your system? They don't have to be dice, of course. They could be cards, bones, coin tosses, or anything else which takes your fancy. Diceless games are ruled by referee and player decisions, rather than fate, and for some players seem 'safer' because they're not subject to the randomness of dice. However, that 'safety' can be stifling. Random factors add a tension to a game that diceless games simply can't provide. However, random factors can also derail a game narrative by introducing something that the players or referee can't predict – failure.

oriented mechanics, such as combat, in which the player's ability to understand how far and fast things are going is essential if the gameplay is going to stay consistent with the game reality. It's important for players to know how many actions they can perform in 'x' amount of time, or how far they can travel in 'y' seconds, or how many bullets they can fire in 'z' period of time. After all, without some real-world scale, it's impossible for players to make sensible decisions about their character's actions.

Making sense of time and space

But this is where a system can cause problems. Many combat and action systems resemble wargames, with time and distance scales, and rules for movement, combat and performing other actions. Imposing such a rigid structure on the game not only breaks the narrative flow, but makes the game subject to rules lawyers who can manipulate the system for their own ends. Fortunately, most referees are sensible enough only to apply a system when the game narrative demands it, so in theory, this shouldn't be too much of an issue. Nevertheless, unless designers choose to ignore scale altogether and leave such decisions entirely to the referee, scaling becomes a necessary, and somewhat complicated evil.

A lot of games rely on the concept of the 'turn' or 'combat round', on which the time scale is based. This is a useful device, because on those occasions when time or distance is critical to the game narrative, a player character's actions can be reduced to discrete portions of time. How long does it take to swing a sword? One round. How long does it take to pick a lock or run a hundred yards? Ten rounds. And so on...

Wargames use something similar. For them, the time scale is based on the 'decision/action' cycle – the time it takes to assess a situation, make a decision, act upon it and carry that action through. In any model it is important that the time scale allows all of these parts of the cycle to take place. If in a roleplaying game, for instance, the time scale is too short, you have to spend an age going through all these stages – one round to make a decision, the next to wind up for a sword blow and so on... It becomes a nonsense, with players becoming increasingly frustrated. If the time scale is too long, there's no scope for players to take several tiny actions in a short period of time, and that means that dramatic sequences are over far, far too quickly.

In RPGs, where players are (usually) playing individual people in a variety of situations, the time scales are quite short.

Many different scales may be needed for a system. A one-second round is no good for a car chase or a massed battle (if your system has rules for them). In real-world military simulations, decision/action cycles may be comparatively long. For a jet fighter pilot it's about ten to 15 seconds. For a tank commander ten to 30 seconds. And despite what the movies may suggest, for a grunt with a rifle it may be five to ten seconds or more.

"Without a real-world scale, it's impossible for players to make sensible decisions."

Putting in every minute detail of a background into a game may appeal to the purists, but can get you into enormous trouble. That powerful spell that saved the day for the heroes of the book trilogy you read can be a pain in the bum when a player has used it for the tenth time. Be prepared to prune the source material – judiciously, of course.

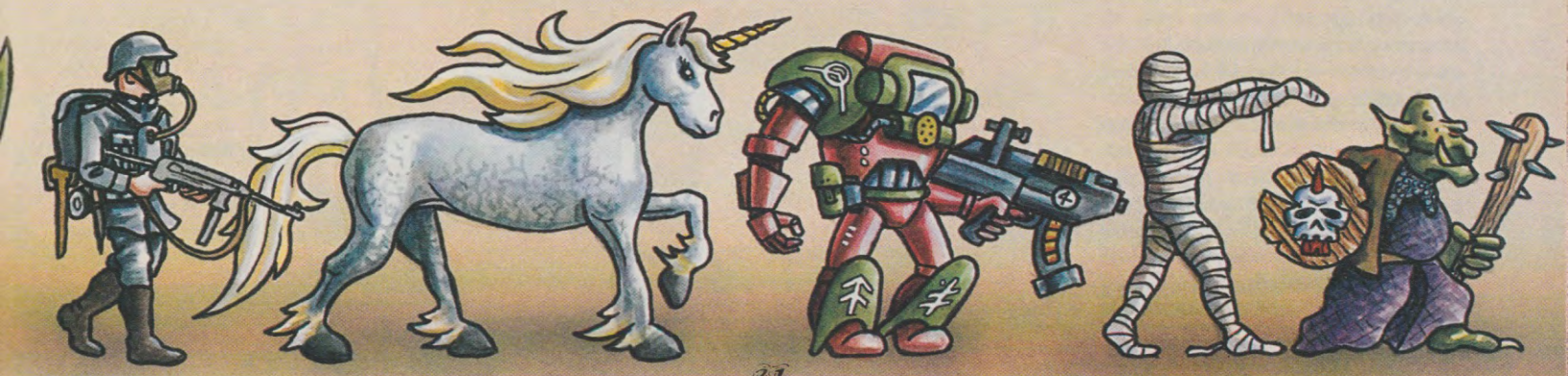
For instance, GDW's *Twilight 2000* based its time scale on four-second rounds. When Paul Mason designed his *Outlaws of the Water Margin* game, he went to the source inspiration – Hong Kong movies – and timed how fast the fights took place on screen. From this, he found that one second was sufficient for most fighters to perform an action, such as a sword attack, and have enough time to fit in a parry as well. Once his one-second time scale was established, the rest of the scaling fell into place and he could build his mechanics around it.

Compromise And The Needs Of Roleplaying

One thing that wargamers have understood for a long time is the need for compromise in the design of game mechanics. The only way to 'realistically' simulate a melee fight between your players is to place real swords in each other's hands and get them to whack each other 'til they bleed. The moment you build a system to simulate that fight on paper, you've made some compromises – you've abstracted here or there, or you've simplified in some way, and your model cannot reproduce the original in every detail. Don't be afraid to make design decisions like this. For instance, you don't have to simulate every possible sword stroke a fencer can make, when instead you can roll it all together into a single attack dice roll.

Next month

In the next part I'll be examining game mechanics in more detail. I'll take a look at systems that can resolve conflicts and discuss the development of core rules, skills and attribute systems. So make sure you get your copy of **arcane** 8 when it hits the shelves on 14th June.



Of D & N

Roleplayers build up stran

they use, as Jona

Fact! Dice can seriously damage your health. Every seasoned games player has entered that pit of despair and visited that Elysium of ecstasy – places where you can be sure your ten-sided will take you during the long stretches of gaming which so successfully manage to fill our spare time. Every player has at some time looked upon his collection of dice with seething hatred, desperate hope or unfettered joy. These tiny items of plastic, metal or bone are enough to reduce grown men to quivering fools.

Because the destiny of roleplaying characters often depends upon them, dice can have a profound effect upon the hands that roll them, and a disturbing mental effect on the minds that attempt to incur supernatural powers in an effort to control them. How many dozens of times have you heard a voice inside your head warning you that the die which lies in your shaking hand will spell doom just before you throw the fatal two which condemns your character to death? And just how often has that same evil tongue intoned your worst fears as you watch your referee roll the perfect percentile which helps your long-standing foe to escape to fight another day?

Throwing For Your Life

Put simply, the relationship between man and his dice is an unpredictable as the weather – it changes from one day to the next. You have good days, you have bad days. On a good day you feel warm and content, on the next you're cold and embittered. It's a turbulent ride which has you hugging them for joy and casting them aside with shame within the space of a session. It's this strange relationship which adds the unpredictability to a roleplaying evening – these wily objects add spice to your games, and they add a touch of chaos.

Dice remain an essential ingredient in the huge majority of roleplaying games, often playing an important role in determining a character's attributes and his ultimate destiny. Yet the effect which they have upon the vast majority of players is just as vital. If you play among a group of friends you've no doubt noted the strange relationships which build up between individuals and their dice – one of the group will undoubtedly be known as the 'lucky swine' who always makes his vital rolls (and who is usually nominated for rolling the dice when the group's fate rests upon it). And at the other end of the scale we have 'the loser'; he who can throw naught but ones and who shies away from the rolling of dice whenever he can.

Generally, there are three types of attitude which illustrate a gamer's relationship with the dice: there's the Cavalier (the aforementioned lucky swine), the Non-believer, and the Painfully Neurotic. Let's take a look at each...

The Cavalier

Here is a man who has the ultimate confidence in his ivories – they shall always do him well, no matter what the day, no matter what the time. He treats them with respect and they always respond to his caresses. He selects his dice with care, examining each before play, picking up a feel for their moods and peculiarities. The Cavalier is the type of man who employs a flamboyant shaking routine, a deft flick of the wrist and displays slight grin when a brace of sixes tumbles to the table. His game

He who casts down his dice with glee – the Cavalier shall know no failure when it comes to chucking his percentiles. Don't you just hate people like that?

He shakes in fear whenever they are thrust into his hand. The Painfully Neurotic sees his dice as his enemies, ever willing to show him up, forever ensuring he fails at whatever task is at hand.

DICE MEN

relationships with the dice

n Smith explains.

characters are always natural leaders of men, invariably strong and self-assured. But the Cavalier quickly makes enemies, with other players secretly harbouring desires for his character's demise and the day when he falls foul of the dice he so confidently throws.

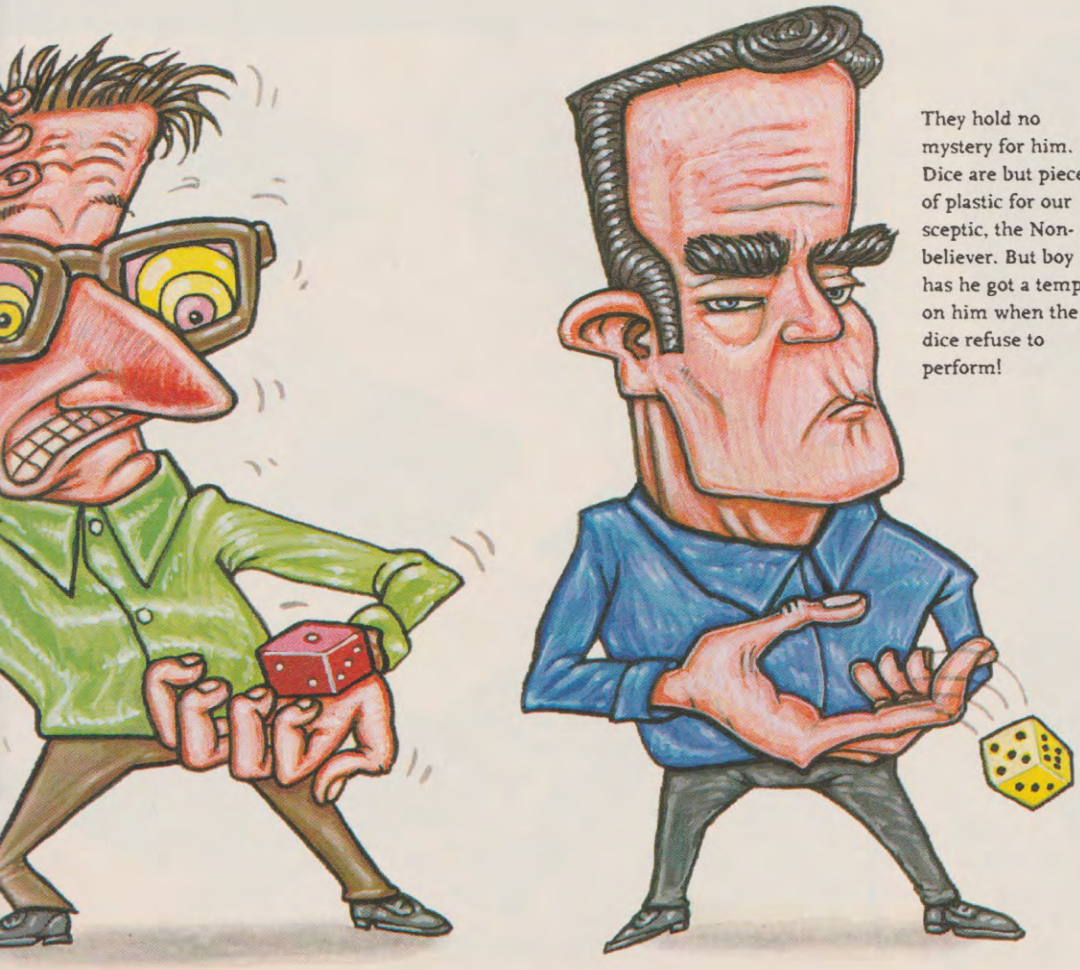
The Cavalier is the first to buy new rules and supplements, which he learns to the letter, forever willing to quote rules back to the referee, and taking advantage of every possible opportunity to put the ref', and the other players in their place.

The Non-Believer

Dice are nothing but inanimate objects – they have no power, they possess no mind of their own and they certainly aren't to be feared or revered! This is the opinion of the Non-believer, he who happily uses any dice, seeing them all as equal. He doesn't care about the fact that the dice are coloured, or that they're transparent – to him, a die is a die. He tosses them to the table as he would throw stale bread to birds; without thought, and without emotion.

He reacts to whatever he rolls with the same poker face, unless the roll is extremely good, in which case an errant eyebrow may rise. An extremely bad roll may induce anger however, with the blatant abuse of the dice to follow – they may be thrown at walls or stamped with a heavy boot into the shag-pile. When the Non-believer is riled, he stops at nothing to exact his revenge.

However, the Non-believer never puts his soul into the sessions he attends – his characters are dull and lifeless, and his participation is minimal. He is an unpredictable fellow, often pulling-out of games without notice (his 'other friends' have got an evening down the pub planned, or his hair need washing). Promised attendance is rarely fulfiled.



They hold no mystery for him. Dice are but pieces of plastic for our sceptic, the Non-believer. But boy has he got a temper on him when the dice refuse to perform!

The Painfully Neurotic

He sits, shaking, shying away from the clutch of six dice which sit before him. He's had a history of failing the party at the vital hour, his rolling attempts hopelessly poor. The Painfully Neurotic is the butt of all the jokes; he's seen many a character die, he's seen many a game collapse into argument, and he's shouted down at every opportunity by the Cavalier who covets his dice on the other side of the table. He is a sad case, turning up to game sessions with the glum knowledge that he's to be disappointed once again.

The Painfully Neurotic buys new dice often, 'This time!', he chants, 'These dice will change my life!' Each and every time it's money wasted – no matter what shape or size, no matter what colour or what shade, no matter how he shakes them, no matter what mantra he utters during the casting, the result is always the same: failure follows him like an obedient dog.

Despite his abysmal record with the dice, the Painfully Neurotic will forever play the game until the bitter end, desperately sure that his luck will change at some stage in the proceedings. His wishes never come true of course, but he's bitterly determined until the end, 'It's the law of averages', he pleads with a desperate look on his face. When it come to a roleplayer and his dice, there's no such thing.

There's no denying it – we all fit into one of these categories, whether we like it or not. So the question remains – just which of our dice-throwing types are you?

TINK WITH

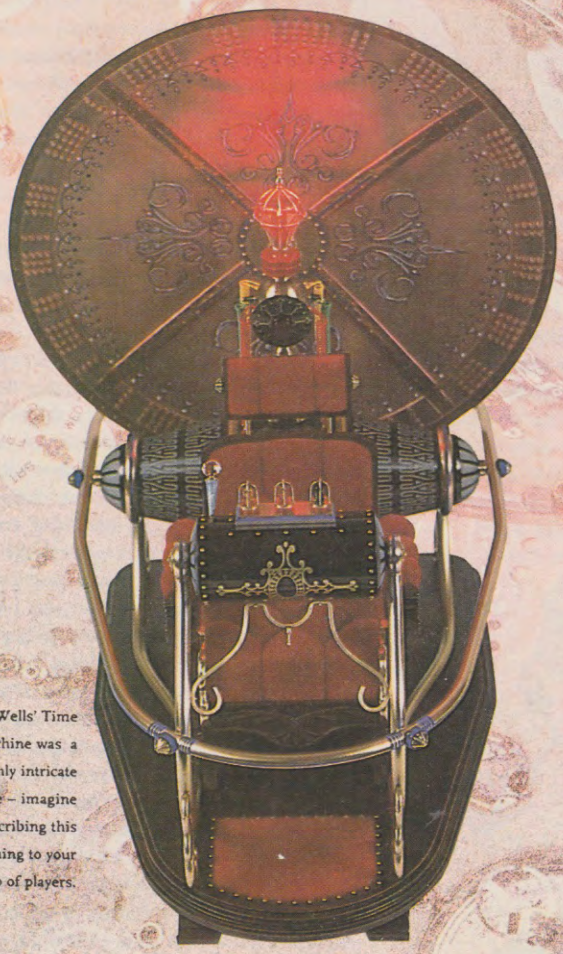
Sending your characters through
but, as Paul Rose explains, b

ROUGH GUIDE TO THE PAST – MUST-SEE ERAS FOR EVERY TIME TRAVELLER...

Each campaign has its own history, but those set on or around Earth – in whatever time period – have a real past to look towards for time travellers. But which era or location should a referee select? In the sidebars over the following pages are a few suggested trips that should offer every referee ample story-telling opportunities.

It's a sci-fi cliché. No-one knows whether it's really possible. For referees it's a logistical nightmare and can turn a great role-playing campaign into a unmanageable quagmire of paradoxes and unfathomable equations. All of these statements are true of time travel yet, despite the almost inevitable problems it will cause, the more creative referees among us frequently flirt with time travel in our campaigns. And so we should, for when it's handled well, travelling through time can make for some of the most exciting and unusual games you'll ever play. And with a little planning, making it work needn't mean endless arguments with players over the resolution of paradoxical events.

The few times a workable set of time travel rules have been attempted, they've either ended up being way too complicated to utilise, or they've been deliberately vague, leaving out guidelines for dealing with many



HG Wells' Time Machine was a highly intricate device – imagine describing this thing to your group of players.

A taste of time

ERING TIME

mists of time may sound like fun
epared for some trouble ahead.

Time machines needn't all look like the TARDIS; they needn't even be machines at all – how about using ancient artifacts or potions instead?

of the awkward situations you're likely to encounter. *GURPS Time Travel* and *Transdimensional Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* both offer plenty of ideas, but neither really lend themselves to adaptation to the games the majority of us play – by tying the subject down to specific genres, they restrict the potential that time travel in roleplaying games offers.

The wonderful thing about time travel is that, with a few exceptions, it can be worked into almost any campaign. Not only is it a great starting point for a story in itself, and one that'll surprise most PCs, but it's also a superb way of recounting the history of your game world.

With a little thought, principles of time travel can be interjected into campaigns that you consider not being at all suitable. If you fear that sending the Millennium Falcon back to the Clone Wars, via some contrived time warp, won't fit into your *Star Wars* campaign, don't despair – have your group come across some mysterious Jedi relic that transports their minds back to an earlier time, perhaps into the bodies of Jedi warriors fighting in that ancient battle. How about *Call of Cthulhu*? The players could experience a powerful vision of the future, brought on by drinking the blood of some unspeakable creature. It's doesn't have to be all police boxes and flying DeLoreans: if you're original in the way you introduce time travel into your campaign, you can avoid the clichés and cut-out many of the potential problems.

WORLD WAR 2
Obvious story lines could involve misguided player characters seeking to assassinate Hitler, or perhaps to aid his efforts. Imagine how different things would be if Germany had got the atom bomb first...

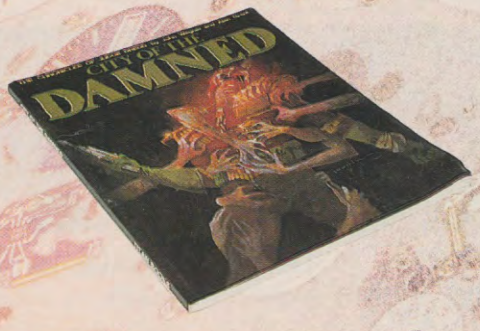
VIETNAM
It's war again, and one that some Americans have never accepted losing. With the advent of time travel, certain groups might try and change that. Would it be ethical? What would be the effect?

VICTORIAN LONDON
Why was it that Jack the Ripper suddenly stopped his reign of carnage? Now the players can find out. Then again, maybe Jack was some psycho from the future and simply returned to his own time to continue his killing. A vampire, maybe? Or a cyborg?

Doing It For Real

Time travel in the real world is a theory that is gathering much support in the scientific community. Since Stephen Hawking published his work on the topic (*A Brief*

There are dozens of books and comics that deal with time travel, and they make essential reading for referees. Check these out...



other books to read...

Time and Again - Jack Finney
Rebel in Time, The Technicolour Time Machine - Harry Harrison
The Corridors of Time, There will be Time, Time Patrolman (and sequels) - Poul Anderson
A Sound of Thunder (short story) - Ray Bradbury
A Brief History of Time - Stephen Hawking

other comics to gawp at...

Animal Man (Grant Morrison's run)
The Invisibles

MEDIEVAL BRITAIN

What did happen to all those dragons? A visiting wizard from the past might be surprised to find he is now powerless. Or how about Arthurian legend? Maybe Merlin was a visitor from the future, stranded in the past. Former colleagues could be sent to bring him home.

History of Time), even the public at large are speculatively suggesting they'll be zipping back in time to visit their great, great grandparents before too long. This makes it much easier for referees to get players to accept time travel as a reality within the games they play. That said, most physicists are keen to stress that creating an artificial wormhole that leads to the past would require the positioning of billions of galaxies around one another, and having them spin at incredible speeds. Only this, they say, would create the necessary gravitational pull. It's not the kind of thing you can do in a science lesson.

Alternatively, you could always fly into a natural wormhole – a black hole – but if the gravity doesn't kill you, the radiation certainly will. Even so, if you're running a high-science campaign set in the distant future, both methods are reasonable, if not exactly practical, time travel options. But what about other settings? Surely there's no place for time travel in, say, *AD&D*? Of course there is. More than any other setting, fantasy campaigns offer the easiest method of having your players flitting through time, because they have magic at their disposal. *2000AD*'s comic-book barbarian Slaine has been hopping from one century to the next for years, so there's no reason why your *Warhammer* or *AD&D* party shouldn't be doing the same – placing them in familiar surroundings (the modern day, say) and having them roleplay true to the knowledge possessed by their characters can be great fun (check out the *D&D Immortals* adventure *IM1: The Immortal Storm* for ideas of a similar nature).

Magic and wormholes are by far the most convenient options for the well-dressed time traveller about town, but they don't fit into every campaign. It's no good casting the magic runes in *Cyberpunk*, and you certainly won't find many black holes down Night City's dark alleyways. In these instances, it's up to the referee to devise some contrivance for moving the players through the years. This is where you roll out the technobabble…

And that, as they say, is as easy as $E=mc^2$. Think *Back to the Future*. Were the workings of the 'flux capacitor' ever explained? No. Think *Quantum Leap*. Did they ever explain how Sam leapt from life to life? Never. Think… well, think *The Time Machine*! The visionary HG Wells would have had no idea that his concepts were theoretically possible when he dreamt up his time traveller. You don't have to explain the precise method by which your time machine functions – work on the premise that the characters couldn't understand it even if the principles were explained to them, so don't bother trying. Devise your method of time travel, or rip off somebody else's, and then fudge the reality to suit your game's level of technology.

The Trouble With Time

When it comes to time travel, getting there is only half the problem – it's the possibility of paradoxes that causes the real trouble. Travelling into the future is relatively easy to play. Of course, future technology could fall into the wrong hands, or players might meet themselves or even witness their own deaths but, on the whole, the future doesn't hold any of the potential pitfalls that travelling into the past does.

Before even contemplating an excursion into yesterday, you'll have to decide the physics of time travel in your world. To wit: what are you going to do when a character prevents his own conception by murdering his father before he meets his mother? You have three, possibly four, options open to you if a character changes history:

A taste of time part 2 MOVIES

Back to the Future 1-3

The Terminator 1, 2

The Time Machine

Time After Time

Time Cop

Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure

Star Trek IV – The Voyage Home

The Philadelphia Experiment 1, 2

One. When you travel into the past you travel into an alternate universe that's identical to the one you came from. Therefore, the players' actions only affect that universe, leaving their own world's timeline intact.

Two. You can't change history. On the way to killing his dad, a player either falls down a hole, breaks his gun, misses a bus or suffers some other unfortunate 'incident' that prevents him from achieving his grisly objective. This is a bit contrived, however.

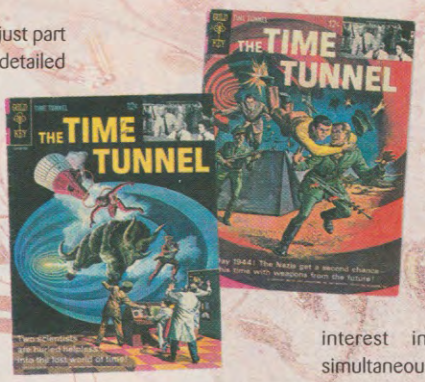
Three. It creates a temporal paradox. Though the character was never born, he still exists. Upon returning to the present, the player is confronted with a world in which he never existed. Only the time travellers remember the original history. For some brain-busting paradoxes, see *Back to the Future 2* and the *Terminator* films.

Four. The character is simply erased from existence. Still a paradox, but a lot tidier, though it tends to upset the player more than a little.

In the real world, the laws of nature remain constant. If you fall out of a tree you hit the ground, without fail, and every time you fall out of a tree the same thing happens. Similarly, the physics in your campaign world should remain constant. If you decide that when travelling to the past you travel to an alternate universe, that should be what happens every single time. Changing physical laws at will can confuse your players. I tend to stick with option three, because I adore paradoxes. Although this method poses more logistical problems than the others, it offers many dramatic possibilities. In short, you can use paradoxes to create better roleplaying situations.

A Different Country

Messing with players' perceptions is just part of the fun. If you've built up a detailed history for your game world, time travel can often be the neatest method of telling it. It's certainly the most interesting from a dramatic standpoint. Rather than just being names in a book, historical figures can be met by your players, who can experience the smells and sounds of the past. At least, they will if you do a good enough job. A good referee planning stories set in the past will do his research and read up on the historical period. This isn't necessary in games such as *Star Wars*, or with fantasy settings, of course – all you've got to do is watch the films or read the sourcebooks.



When I ran a *DC Heroes* campaign, I devised a time travel plot line set in the 1960s. I researched as much as I could about the period: politics, entertainment, world events. I watched films and documentaries to get a feel for the fashions and the way people spoke. It may have been a bit extreme but, judging from the players' reactions, it was without a doubt the most successful time travel adventure I ever ran.

When dealing with real history, it's all too easy to stereotype the past, so some research is essential; your players just won't enjoy themselves if the past is a two-dimensional cardboard cut-out of a place. Only by making it real can you run a successful time travel story line.

When handled carefully, time travel can kick any flagging campaign back into life. It can re-awaken your players' interest in the game world, while simultaneously giving any referee's creative muscles a good work-out. So go on, give it a go – there's no time like the present. Except maybe the past. Or the future...

PREHISTORIC TIMES

A Hollywood big-shot wants to make the next *Jurassic Park*. Who needs special effects when he can film the real thing...?

Time travel hasn't been ignored by film and TV, either. Check out some of these for use in your own scenarios...

TV Series

planet of the apes (and sequels)

quantum leap

the outer limits

the twilight zone

doctor who

star trek (selected episodes from all eras)

other films & TV progs more than worthy of a look...

films

the final countdown, buck rogers in the 25th century, twelve monkeys, time bandits, les visiteurs (subtitled), and groundhog day

TV shows

sapphire and steel, buck rogers, goodnight sweetheart, the new adventures of superman, mr bean, red dwarf, and the tomorrow people

the source

Curious things with a sometimes tenuous link to fantasy gaming...

Decorated Card Boxes

Cardboard boxes with pretty pictures on. **Supplied by Esdevium Games, available from all good gaming stores.** £2.95 **(800 capacity)** £1.95 **(100 capacity)**

Mage Tarot Deck

Consider any expansion sets to represent alternative courses off Destiny's path. **Supplied by White Wolf, available from all good gaming stores.** £17.99

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Fill with pink blancmange and pretend to dine on the brains of the crew. **Supplied by Home Entertainment, available from PO Box 10351, London NW2 6WG. 0181 4537000.** £14.99

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Vampires can fill it with Ribena and suck away with a straw during games. **Supplied by the hospital, available from all good hospitals.** Give some blood

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For the more discerning undead. **Supplied by Esdevium Games, available from all good gaming stores.** £8.95

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The wheels enable dragons to travel anonymously through city traffic disguised as tourist buses. **Supplied by Britains, available from all good gaming stores.** £2.99

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Intimidate your opponent by looking the part. **Supplied by Hobbycase, available from all good gaming stores.** £6.99

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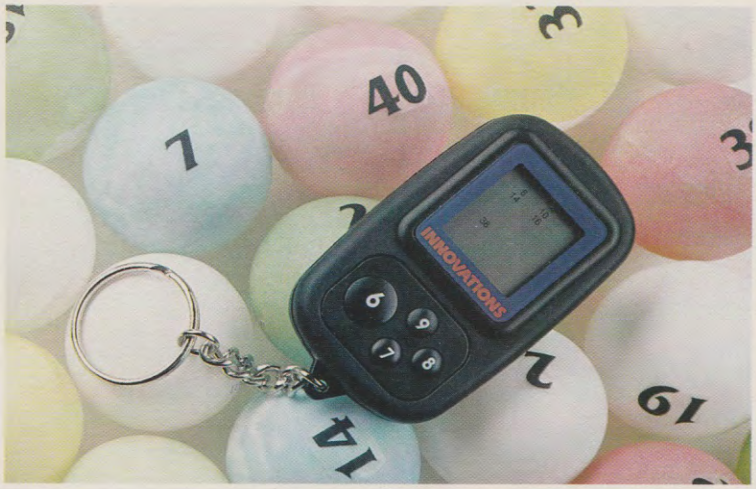
Not a box of magic, as the name suggests, but another way of carrying 150 *M:TG* cards about. **Supplied by Chessex, available from all good gaming stores.** £6.95 **for a pack of three**



Lucky Number Picker

Chase good money after bad with this innovative new way of denying the statistical inevitability that you're never going to win the lottery as long as you live. **Supplied by Innovations, available from all good gaming stores.** £ less than the lottery. Consider it an investment if you will

Spellgrounds

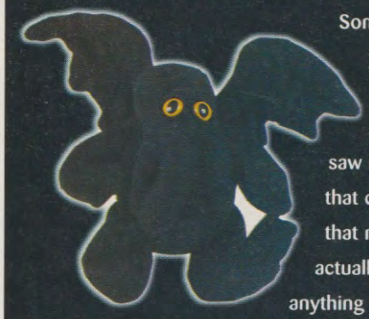
More CCG related cash-ins: Spellground (21" x 14") and Spellground Elite (26" x 26"). Supplied by Esdevium Games, available from all good gaming stores. £9.95 **and** £13.95 **respectively**

win! arcane COMPETITION in association with us

Send us your trash!

The Source 'Readers' Tat' competition

Let's play a little game, then. Do you have anything particularly strange, curious or funny for these pages? Anything as odd as our Dragon On Wheels, for example? Or the Papa Cthulhu doll in **arcane** 4? Or the Automatic Card Shuffler from **arcane** 2?



Something that made you knit your eyebrows the first time you saw it? Something that convinced you that real life was actually stranger than anything your referee could dream up? Then send it in with a suitably daft caption and we'll feature the choicest item in The Source later in the summer. We promise to return everything we get if you give us an address, and whoever sends in the wackiest thing with the funniest caption will win everything else featured in The Source that month. And we'll be saving up all the bonkers gear specially as well.

So wrap it up and send your trash to 'My Tat' compo, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

1. Anyone can play, though make sure you own the stuff before you send it in.
2. Multiple entries are positively encouraged, the more stuff you send in, the better.
3. The editor picks the winner, and his decisions are final.
4. We'll return all entries, honest.
5. No, straight up. Have we ever lied to you?
6. Closing date – late summer, by which we mean before the autumn.

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the games mail order service

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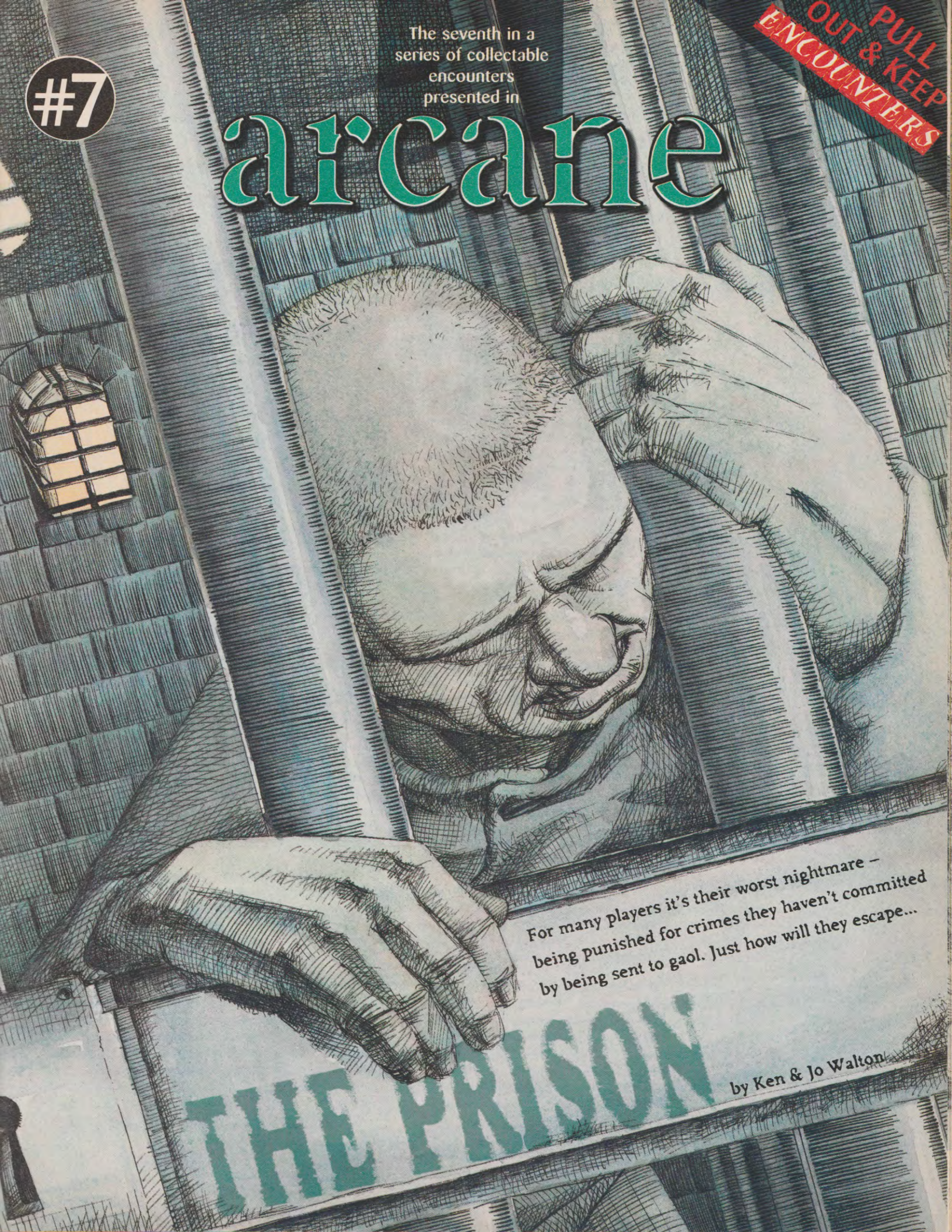
#7

The seventh in a series of collectable encounters presented in

arcane

PULL OUT & KEEP ENCOUNTERS



For many players it's their worst nightmare – being punished for crimes they haven't committed by being sent to gaol. Just how will they escape...

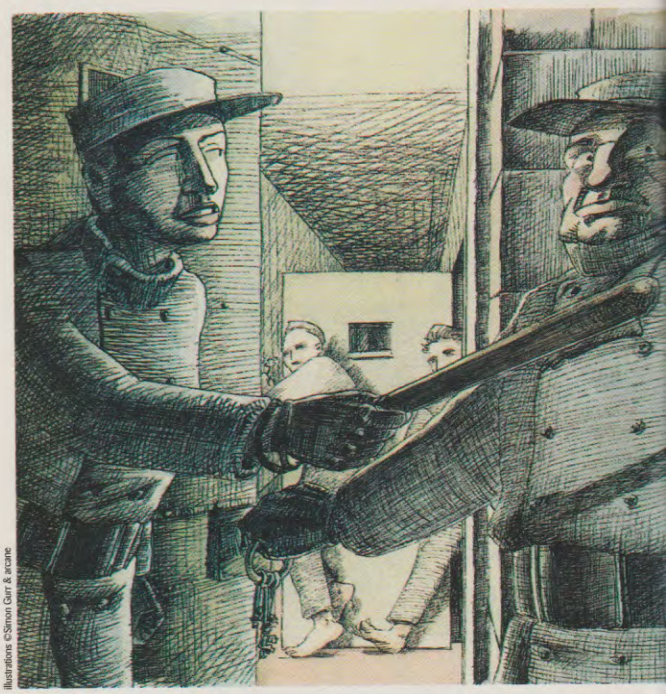
THE PRISON

by Ken & Jo Walton

arcane *proudly presents another excellent 11-page scenario that you can use in any setting, any era...*

"And Throw Away the Key"

The Prison



Illustrations ©Simon Gurr & arcane

"You will be taken from this court to a place of confinement, where you will spend the rest of your natural days..." The words of the judge still echoed in my ears as I was ushered through the huge doors of the prison, between high, blank stone walls. The doors swung shut behind me with a booming and awful finality. There was a rattling of keys as a smaller door was opened before me and closed behind me. Then I was marched along corridors, where blank, hopeless faces stared at me from the small windows of cells. Finally, the guards stopped me at a cell; my cell. The door was flung open with a crash and I was pushed unceremoniously into the small, square room which was to be my home for the rest of my life. While I was still recovering my balance, the door of the cell shut with a hollow thump. I turned to ask the guards something, but they were gone. I looked round at the dank stone walls, carved with layers of graffiti, ancient and modern, and thought of all the others who had suffered here before me. They said that this prison was escape-proof. I would prove them wrong. And once I was out, I would prove my innocence, and get my revenge on those who had stolen my throne...

How often do PCs get into serious trouble with the authorities? Whether they be the Imperial Stormtroopers or the City Watch, the equivalent of the police nearly always responds by throwing the whole party into prison to cool their heels. There are a variety of things that can happen to a game at this point. It can stagnate, with the party settling down to spending their lives behind bars; or they might attempt an escape. This encounter gives you, as the referee, all you need to insert a prison into any setting of any period, with people to meet and ideas for plot development stemming from a period of imprisonment.

Pre-Modern Prisons

Pre-modern prisons can be anything from a fantasy/medieval dungeon to a Victorian prison. They were often underground (stereotypical dungeons), though large institutions were also common. The plans provided are of the floor immediately below ground-level. What is up the stairs is entirely at your discretion – it could be anything; the more modern floor, a castle, more prison floors, a watch post or a police station.

The Cells

Whatever may lie above, this floor is used for the imprisonment and (even) torture of criminals. People here temporarily have their weapons removed before being thrown into the single confinement cells, or into one of the three 'party sized' cells. These rooms are unlikely to be empty, and this is a good place

The System

You're a smart person, right? We don't need to patronise you with detailed rules on how to translate these people and events into your own system, do we? But just in case you're uncertain, here's a couple of tips. Whenever we do a character description (though there aren't too many in this scenario), we'll say something like 'Doctor Bloggs has a fine, incisive mind and this is complemented by a strong, athletic body. As a child, however, he suffered from a rare lung disorder that means he has difficulty in sustaining effort. He is also prone to making rather impulsive decisions.' In game terms this would mean that Doctor Bloggs has above-average strength, intelligence and dexterity and below-average constitution and wisdom. Exactly how much above and below average is up to you and the strength of your party of adventurers. This is also the case in systems that use levels. Give the encounter's characters the sort of levels that will make them a challenge for your players. You'll find similar descriptions of all important physical objects, such as 'the door is paper-thin' or 'this glass is bullet-proof'. Now stop reading this wibble and get stuck in.

to meet people who might be helpful. One of these cells has the beginnings of a tunnel. The potential use of this tunnel should be decided in advance – it might be an impossible project leading to solid bedrock, or it might be almost finished with escape not too far out of reach.

The Dungeon

Longer stay prisoners are first taken to the torture chamber for fitting with leg-irons, hand-cuffs, chains or balls and chains as is considered appropriate. After that, they're confined within the dungeon. Some especially dangerous criminals hang chained to the wall, and others are flung into the central pit, which is barred on top. The PCs are fed on scraps which are flung down to them but once a day. Those imprisoned here have seen no light for years, save the little that filters in through the high bars in the wall, and are often in a condition of grave despair.

The Torture Chamber

The torture chamber contains blacksmith's equipment for attaching chains and irons to prisoners. His forge and anvil occupies one large corner and is of sinister appearance. Prisoners brought directly here for fitting with irons are generally not informed as to the nature of their visit – seeing their faces as they view the torture equipment is the kind of joke many prison guards (and referees!) enjoy. The room contains an Iron Maiden, a large rack, pincers, hot irons, clubs and other strange, evil-looking torture equipment.

Gibbet

Many prisoners held here are awaiting death by hanging. There is a gibbet immediately outside the prison, at the top of the steps which lead down. Going up the steps may lead to freedom, or it may merely be the way to the 'last dance' of the hanged man. The stench of death pervades this place.

From the Nineteenth Century to the Future

Throughout the 1800's humanitarian ideas about treating prisoners as human beings became more important. There was a strong prison reform movement, and it led to prisons more like the second plan.

The Way In

Anyone coming into the prison must pass through the cobbled outer courtyard. This area is well lit at night, and the walls are topped with barbed/razor wire, or maybe spikes or broken glass. The gate is locked and guarded at all times, and the sentry box is always manned. The inner door is also guarded and leads directly into the reception area/guard room. There are always at least three guards in this room, and this is where any prisoners are registered upon entry. They are then taken into an 'interview room' and searched, all their clothes and belongings are removed and prison issue garments given to them as replacements.

The Holding Cells

Prisoners awaiting sentencing are usually held in the holding cells. These are individual cells separated from each other by iron bars. It is usual for two or more people to be held in each of the small cells. People held in these cells can talk to anyone else in the room, although they may not make themselves popular if they disturb others. A group being brought in might be split between the cells so that every individual is locked in with a stranger. This can be a good place to meet people, but it can also be very dangerous. Guards only intervene if there is a serious disturbance.

The Long-Stay Cells

Longer-stay prisoners may be held in the cells on the other side of the corridor, or in similar cells upstairs. These cells hold up to three people in very cramped conditions. They have solid doors with a small grille opening. They are lit by small, high barred windows and by artificial light. In modern and future prisons there are televisions in the long-stay cells. These sets are tuned to one channel only, always a loud commercial one, and are fixed immovably above the door. They are permanently on, unless switched off from the guard room, and the volume can not be adjusted. In future settings they may be used to watch the cells as well as for providing torture and/or entertainment for the prisoners. Long-stay prisoners may spend up to 23 hours a day in their cells.

The Work Room and Library

Long-stay prisoners spend some time every day in the work room. They are also allowed two books a week from the library – this routine is not varied under any circumstances. The library is only open for one afternoon a week, and it is closed in the event of riot. In the work room prisoners can make a little money working on unpleasant jobs such as sewing mailbags and making bricks. Only ten prisoners are allowed into the work room at a time. It contains machinery for working at the required task, which is inevitably supervised. The task may vary according to the time and place. In California in the 1990s prisoners work on making the popular "Prison Blues" denim jeans. The work should always be something dull and highly unpleasant. Tools will not be available which could otherwise be used as weapons, although they may have alternate uses as escape tools. Tools are checked in and out of prisoners' possession.

The Exercise Yard

There is a sentry box in the exercise yard which is always occupied. The walls of the yard are high and are topped with barbed wire and spikes. The yard is well lit at night and may be alarmed. The ground is cobbled and weed-strewn. In normal circumstances it would seem a very desolate place, but to prisoners it is a haven of fresh air and a chance to get closer to nature. Sometimes they may be allowed to slouch around as they please, other times the guard may make them run around in the small space. No more than ten prisoners at a time are allowed in the exercise yard.

The Kitchens

Prisoners who behave well may be allowed to help in the kitchens. This is highly desirable work, because it's varied. There are two full time cooks, who always need help, which may include taking food to other prisoners as well as cooking basic

dishes. There is a delivery door out of the kitchen which is kept locked, but which may be an escape route.

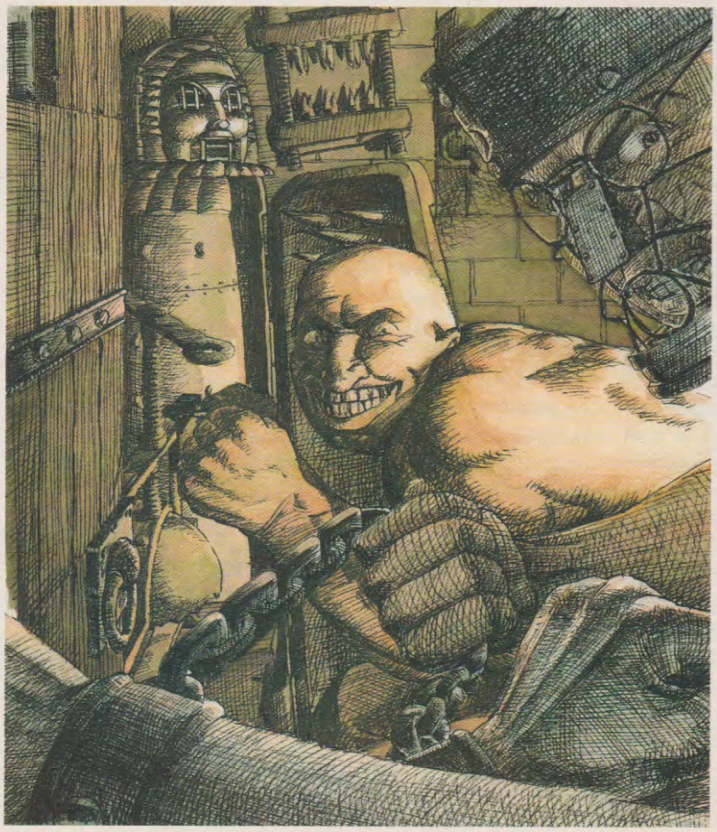
The Interview Rooms

The two 'interview rooms' are used for searching new prisoners and occasionally for extracting confessions from them. One of them is set up with desks and chairs, though it may also have video or cassette-tape equipment for the recording of interviews. It has lockers for storage of prisoners' belongings, which are sealed in plastic bags and returned on release. The other room is equipped with modern torture equipment – tables with handcuffs, truncheons, electrical equipment and the like. It is not necessary to explain what all of it is used for, as long as an air of fear can be maintained, (see the section on Torture). In the Twentieth Century and later, all of this modern equipment will probably be marked 'Made in Britain', wherever in the world the prison is. Britain is the world's largest exporter of such 'police equipment'. There is also a sensory deprivation chamber – this looks like an upright coffin or a modern Iron Maiden, and it's rarely used.

The People

Prison Employees

Prison guards are generally an unpleasant lot. Sensitive and compassionate people either leave the job rapidly or they soon develop a hard shell. They all wear identical uniforms. Names (and even sexes) of guards should be changed for different settings, but the personalities will work in any background.



Martin Perry, Guard

Martin Perry came into the profession of prison guard because he was out of work and this was his only option. He is over six foot tall and very broad-shouldered, with a loud voice. He has dark hair and sometimes people liken him to a bear. In his ten years here he has had plenty of opportunity to learn how things are done. His first reaction is always to shout, and only after that will he resort to violence. He has a serious expression, though he is soft-hearted and does not like helping with torture sessions. If he knows that someone is on death row he tries to be kind to them in his gruff way. He is married and has three growing children at home.
Quotes: "I'm only doing my job.", and, "Why don't you co-operate, sir, and then there won't be any unpleasantness."

Luke Townsend, Guard

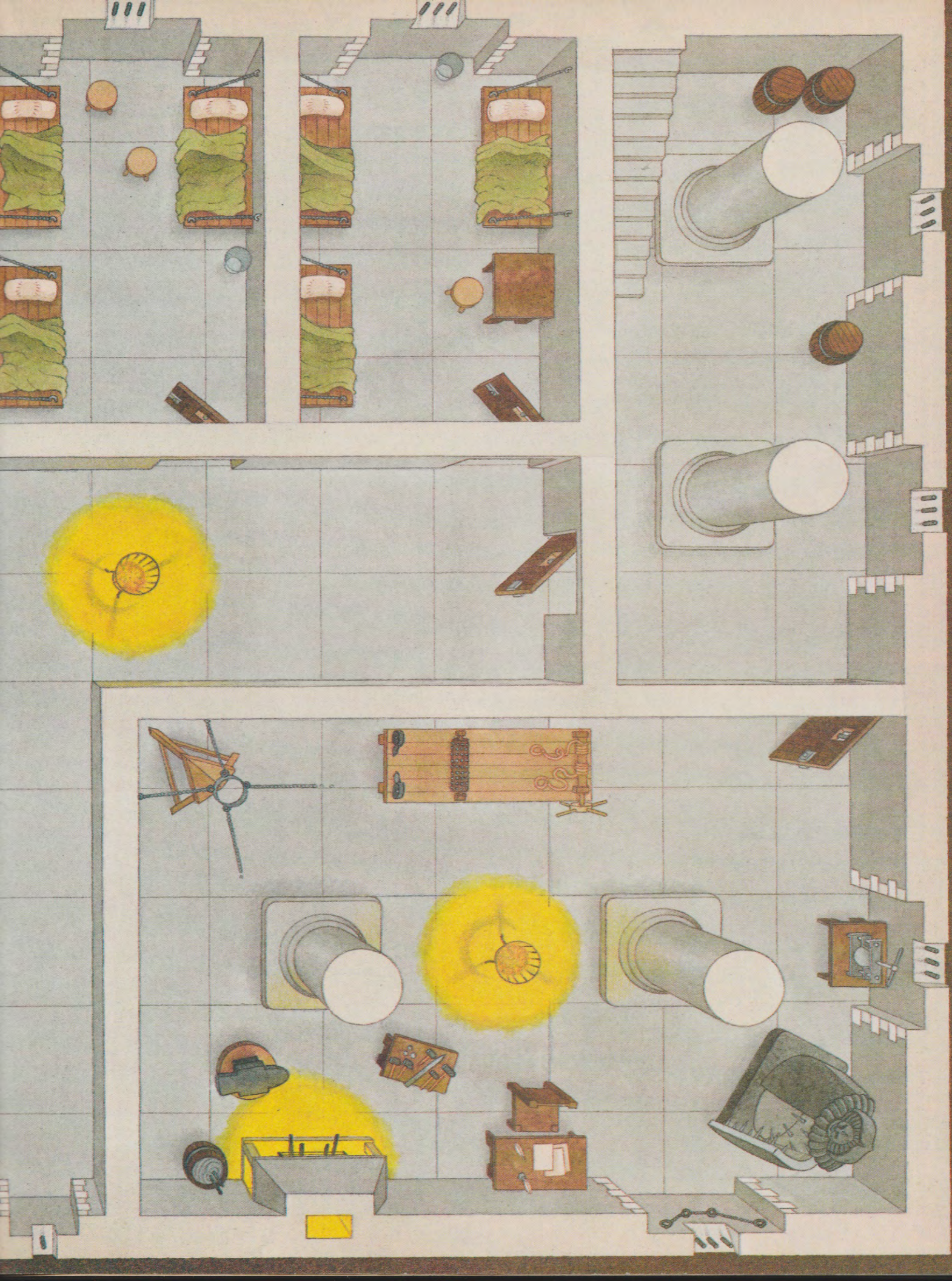
Luke is the opposite of Martin in all ways. He is short and wiry, and has a sadistic streak. He enjoys seeing people unhappy and will sometimes trip a chained prisoner to see them fall, revelling in their helplessness. He is always smiling, especially when at his most cruel. He has been a guard for three years, and he sometimes helps with interrogation. In these cases he and Martin take turns at playing "good guy/bad guy". Sometimes they can be heard arguing in the guard room about whose turn it is next.
Quote: "Maybe you'll have a little accident. What a shame."

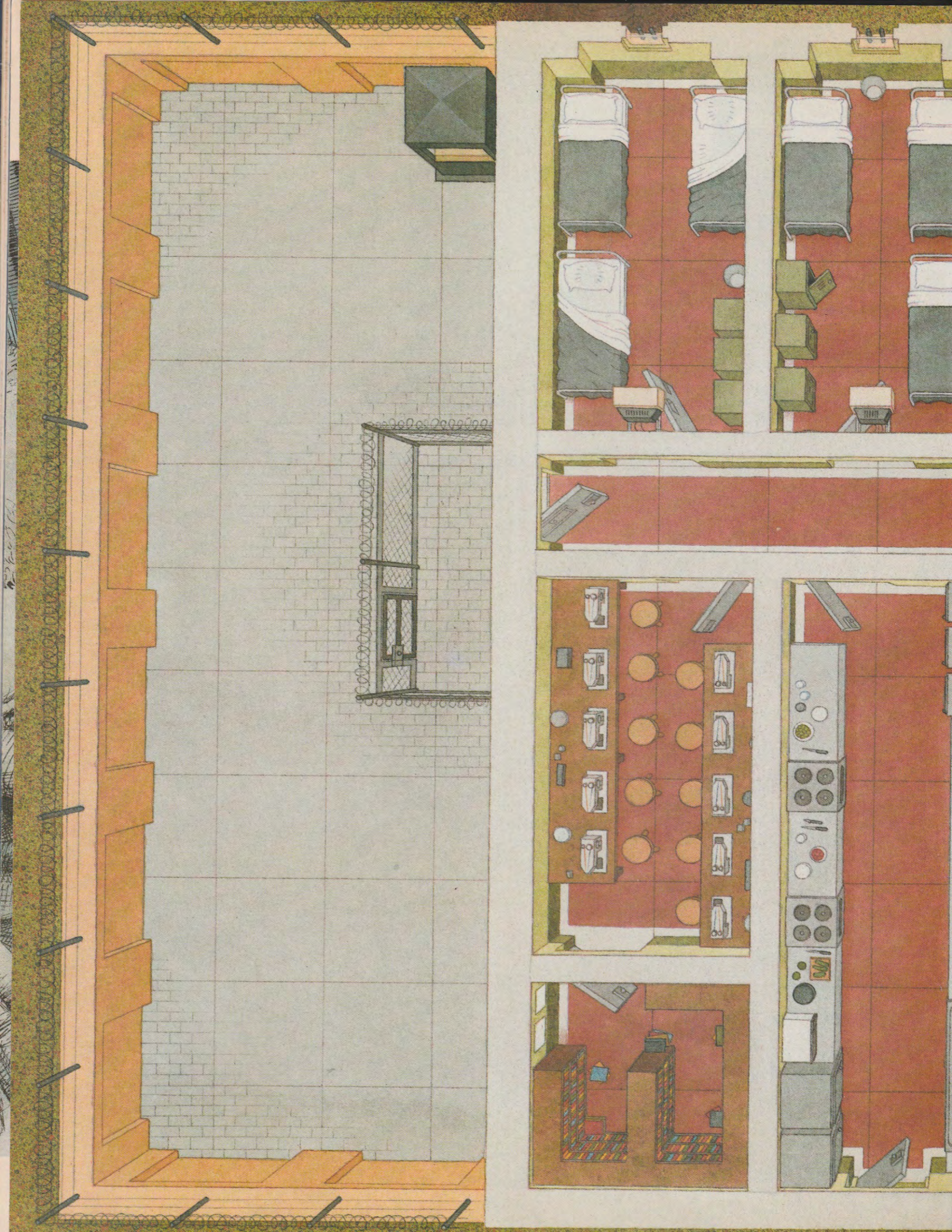
Amanda Fraser, Guard

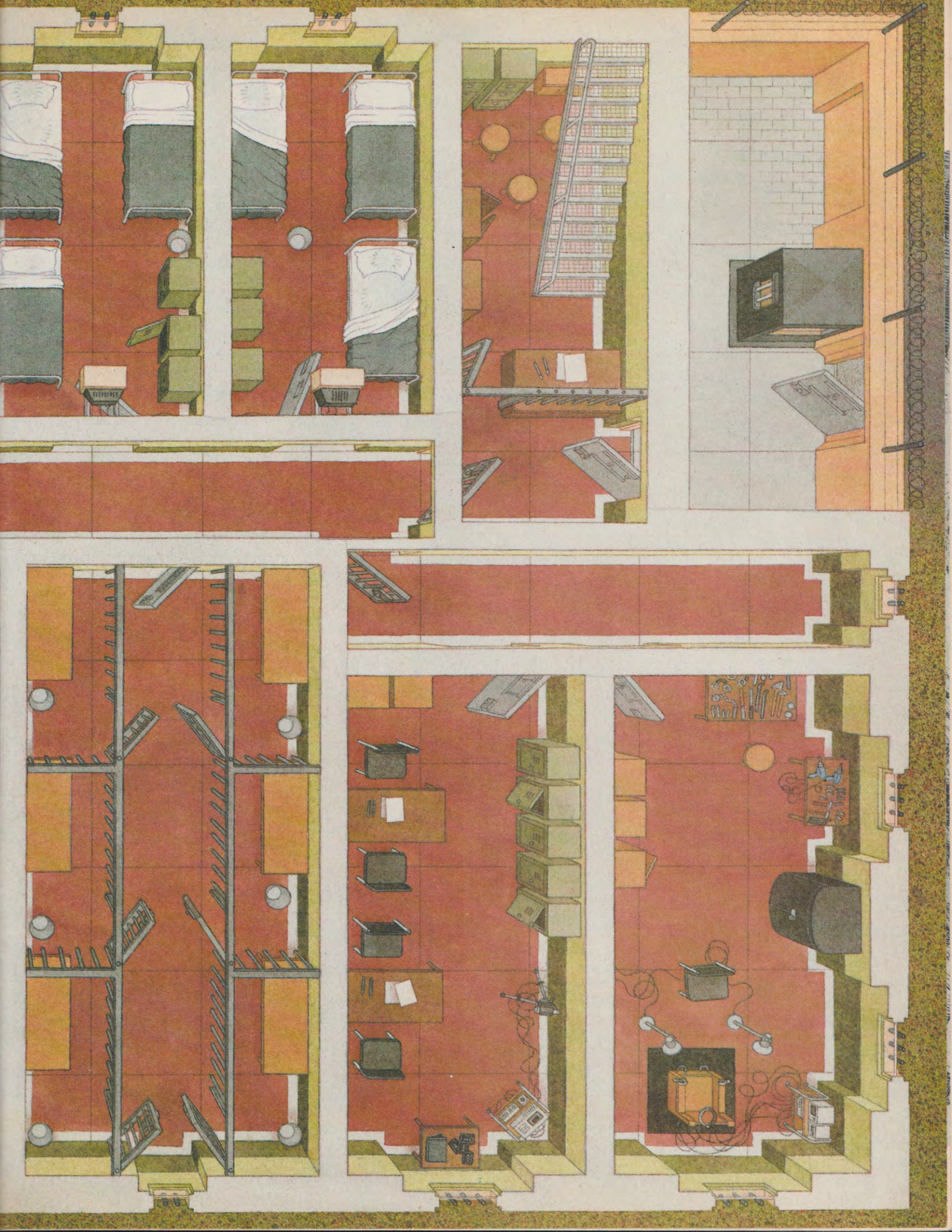
Amanda has been a guard for five years, and she isn't sure if she likes it much. She is a medium-sized woman with a very sharp nose, which she has a habit of rubbing when she is thinking. She always carries a weapon and has an air of being willing to using it – she's killed prisoners on several occasions, though every time she's managed to prove extenuating circumstances. She doesn't mind what she does, and has no qualms or sentimentality. Having said that, she doesn't particularly enjoy her job, either. She took it because she wanted to make some money. She soon realised that there were ways of increasing the money she made by accepting bribes and selling services. Amanda sells drugs at extortionate rates, she will smuggle parcels from friends to prisoners, and she will accept bribes to allow the prisoners brief access to keys for long enough for them to make impressions of them. She may even turn a blind eye to an escape if it does not implicate her. She regularly accepts bribes to ignore tunnels and other non-immediate escape plans. Sometimes she then betrays the prisoner to the other guards. She will do nothing without cash in advance, and will laugh at promises of future gain.
Quote: "If you make it worth my while, I might.", or, "What's in it for me? I've got to look out for number one, haven't I, sunshine?"

Kevin Swansson, Torturer

Kevin is a specialist in torture machinery. In a medieval/fantasy world he began life as a blacksmith, in a more modern world he began as an engineer. Now







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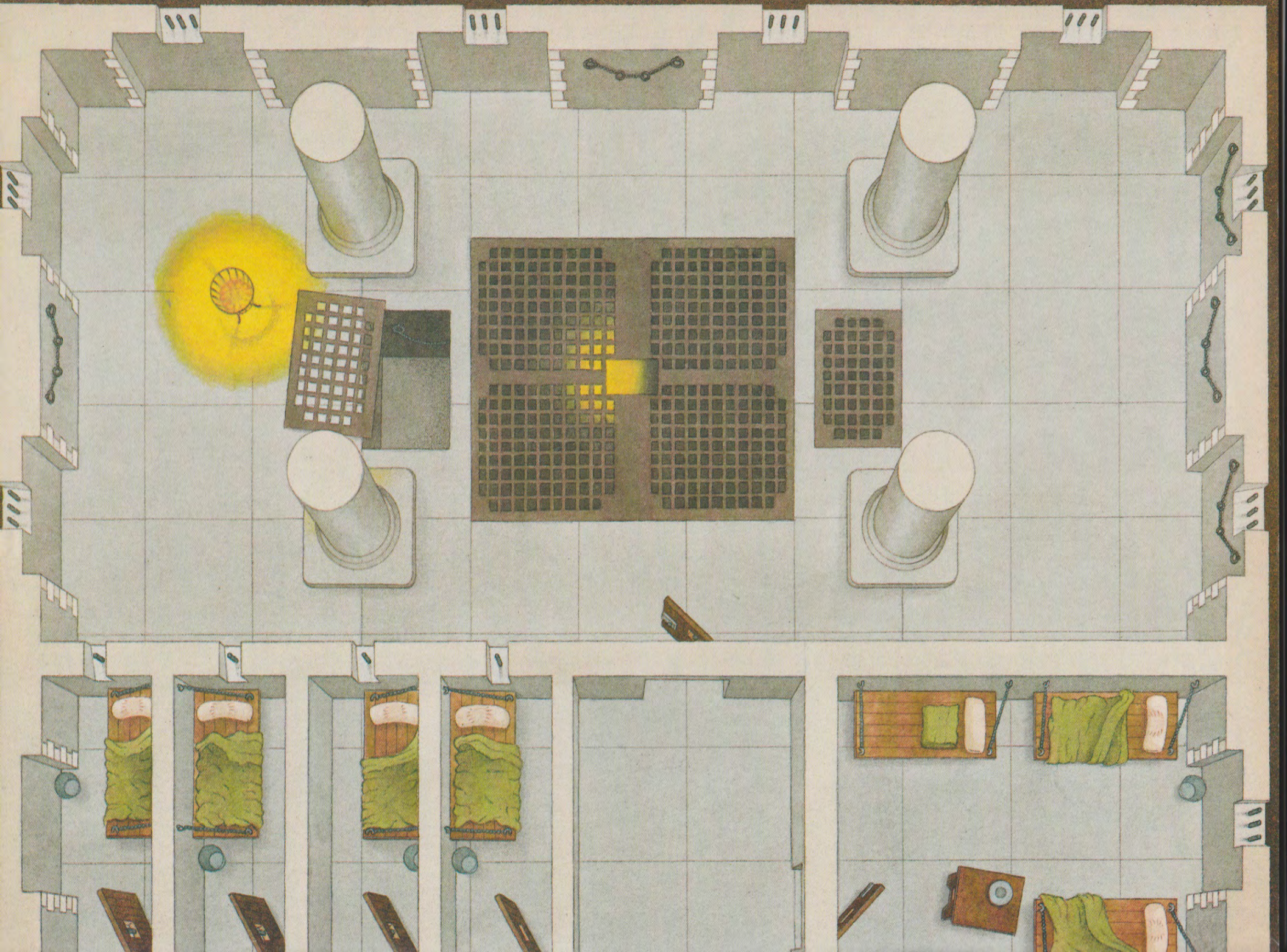


torture equipment is his obsession. He likes testing and refining it and designing his own new inventions. He does not think of the prisoners as people but rather as subjects. He rarely performs torture alone – his superiors say he is not bright enough to ask the right questions. In fact, they question his ability to stop before killing the prisoner. Often an official does the interrogation, with Kevin just working the machines. On other occasions Luke may be trusted with the questions. Kevin has huge muscles and wears blacksmith's clothes or a white coat. He will make interested remarks during torture sessions.
Quote: "Not many screams today, maybe I ought to tighten the rivets up.", and, "If you wouldn't mind waiting for a moment, I'll start to torture you when I've oiled this."

Other Prisoners

Who the other prisoners are depends very much on where the prison is. In most places a large proportion of the inmates are out-and-out criminals – people who make their living from crime and can imagine no other way of life. In a repressive regime there may also be political prisoners and people imprisoned by mistake (or to keep them out of the way). There is likely to be a mixture of people who have committed a lot of petty crime and others who have done one awful thing. Their names and sexes should be adjusted to suit the period.

Tim Fenton

Tim is a burglar. He is tall and thin with greasy, ginger hair. He explains that he was caught because he couldn't get out of a window fast enough. He is nineteen, and this is his first experience of time in prison. He has been a criminal for ten years, and both his parents have spent time inside. He speaks a criminal slang and has a lot of words he uses instead of 'prison': 'in porridge', 'in stir', 'inside', 'put away' and the like. He distinguishes clearly between minor crimes such as theft, burglary and house-breaking, all of which he has practiced. Upper class characters will find much of his speech unintelligible. Tim is friendly and amiable unless he feels he has been insulted. He knows how to fight in a street fashion that knows nothing about chivalry – a dirk which he usually secretes in his socks is his preferred weapon. Tim is the perfect pattern for any number of petty criminals which make up the majority of any prison population.

Barry Gilbert

Barry is a thug. He's well over six foot tall, and he'd have trouble spelling his own name if asked. He gets angry when people disturb him, or when mocked, and tends to attack by picking people up and dropping them again (down stair wells, more often than not), although he is a good brawler. He's doing time for assault, and it's likely he'll be straight back in again when he finally gets out.

Katherine Farrer

Katherine is an attractive middle-aged, middle-class woman who poisoned her husband. He was a merchant who was involved with another woman. Katherine found out and cold-bloodedly poisoned his food, expecting to be left a rich widow. When she was discovered by her husband's brother, she denied everything. She still denies it, but she had been convicted, and the other prisoners are extremely wary of her. She is polite to a clean and friendly bunch of adventurers, and describes the other prisoners as 'low lives'. She may well be familiar with places the party need to investigate and happily gives them information. She is convincing and articulate, and information she gives is always accurate.

Sir Oliver Todd

Sir Oliver supposedly assassinated another member of the nobility. He claims he was framed, and offers to give the party information that will lead to exposing corruption 'at the very highest levels'. He is a fat, florid man in early middle-age, starting to go bald. Following-up his leads lands the party into endless intrigue. His guilt or innocence and his motives are best left open to flexible interpretation.

Ex-King Zorg

Ex-king Zorg appears to be a madman – he has wild eyes and dishevelled hair, he babbles constantly about 'my kingdom' and 'the traitors'. He offers to make the party dukes and earls if they will help him escape and restore him to power in his Puritanian country. It is easy to dismiss his fantasies out of hand, but he genuinely is a king, wrongfully imprisoned. He has been digging an escape tunnel for some years. It leads from his cell and right the way under the prison wall.

Konstantin the Mad

Imprisoned for murder, Konstantin the Mad has been hanged twice already, but both times, improbably, the rope broke and he escaped. Now he has committed a third murder, and he is sure he will escape again. He moves like a soldier, being a combat veteran. He is very twitchy and paranoid and given to asking if 'they' are around. He has the equivalent in his own period of shell-shock, and is highly unpredictable. He is likely to over-react to any threatening situations.

Torture

As every torturer knows, torture works far better as a threat than as a reality. Of course, you don't really want to do any permanent damage to the characters, but you do want them to be frightened of the possibility. If someone wants to get something out of your PCs, it is generally far more effective to use the threat of torture – showing them the implements and describing the pain – than actually to start torturing them. Other effective threats include showing them someone racked so badly he can hardly walk or someone blinded and badly scarred from hot irons. This is even more effective in a modern or future setting, where threats can be made concerning the use of electricity and machines. The shadowy nature of what the machine does can be very effective. If it does become necessary to torture a character, it works best to stress the potential long term physical effects ('You may never use that finger again'), and the pain, and only incidentally deal with it in terms of game mechanics. In modern and future settings a 'torture machine' which causes pain without doing harm can be a useful game device.

Prisons Through the Ages

As long as there has been crime and criminals there have been prisons of one kind or another. Prisons have always been unpleasant. Many societies do not have prisons, merely places for people to await justice. Punishments such as cutting off a hand, a foot, or a head for offenses cost the state far less than feeding a prisoner for a protracted period of time.

Some different prisons you can use in your games are prisoner-of-war camps, such as Colditz in World War II. British prisoner-of-war camps in India were so relaxed that German prisoners were allowed to go shopping in town. Amazingly, they returned – with the ladders and files they had bought – and escaped by night in traditional style.

Open prisons seem to be fashionable these days; and they may become more so in the future. We already have collars which let the police know where a criminal is; these could be fitted with a device which explodes if the prisoner goes too far from designated areas (there are a few science-fiction films which have used such devices).

Adventure Seeds

Prison is often thought of by seasoned players as little more than a diversion. After all, the players know they won't be roleplaying sitting in a cell for the next ten year's worth of

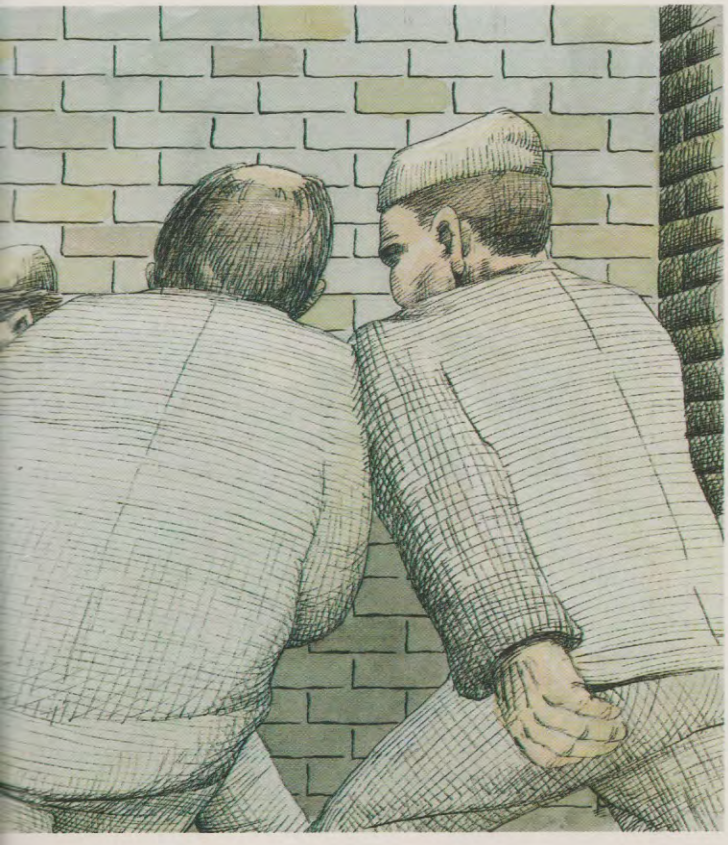
game sessions. They may think they're in a hot-knife-through-butter situation. Get round this by emphasising the differences in this prison from those they may have been to in the past – describe the grim criminals and the deeply unpleasant atmosphere, and make them realise that they're now no better than the other inmates, and that if they break free the authorities will most certainly be after them. Be sure not to trivialise the horrors of prison; when they are in a cell, have footsteps echo down the corridor towards them, but never stop at their door. Whether or not you intend to torture them, have screams and strange sounds come from the torture chamber. Stress how small a space they are held in, and mention the smells, and the sense of despair and gloom.

Adventures in Prison

So, the doors close behind them with a clang. Now what? Make sure that things start to happen from the first moment they're inside – have them put in chains and force them to start interacting with other prisoners. Involve them in prison intrigues, and have them begin to learn new skills from other prisoners; make them believe they're in for a long stay, whatever your real intentions.

Contacts, Enemies and Crime-School

Being in prison can be a great opportunity for PCs. The other prisoners provide an opportunity for interaction which may give the party information they could have got in no other way. Or there may be important people wrongfully imprisoned who will be grateful when rescued. Fellow prisoners may know their way around buildings the PCs need to enter after their release.



Inmates may have been imprisoned for some secret information which later starts the party going on another scenario. It is also easy for the party to make an enemy of another prisoner, who then may prove to be difficult to get rid of when they're all back in the real world. Other prisoners can provide information and teach underworld-type skills such as lockpicking, burglary and fighting techniques.

Starting a revolt

A prison riot can start for any reason, at any time, even if prisoners are never allowed to congregate together. Starting one, or being involved in one, can be an interesting experience for a party.

Starting out inside

Starting a game in prison can be an interesting and different way of bringing a party together. Suggest that everyone design characters who have for some reason been imprisoned – whether rightfully or wrongfully – and then introduce them in the cell. It certainly gives people a reason to be together and form that essential team relationship if they're locked up in the same confines.

Escaping

Escaping is the traditional way to get out of jail quick, and there are so many different ways of doing it. There are direct, physical means such as digging tunnels, forging a key, and filing through the bars, and these often work best if combined with a second method, such as tricking or bribing a guard, or with help from outside. Another way is to persuade other prisoners to riot and to escape in the confusion. Prisoners with super-powers may be able to smash through walls, either leaving a hole behind them or not as the case may be. In a world with magic, spells can be used either on their own or in combination with the other methods to help in an escape attempt. Wizards not wishing to reveal themselves as magic users may find subtle uses of magic that can be confused with mundane methods of escape. For instance, magical heating and cooling of iron prison bars will induce them to crack, leaving evidence of broken bars but not of magic. Prisons that are expecting magicians may have magical defenses, such as a zone that nullifies magic, or magical traps preventing escape.

Back to reality

Characters leaving prison after a long stay may discover changes in the world (and they may be mentally hampered by the shock of having to cope with normal life again). Prisons can be used by the referee to get the party out of the game world for a while, giving the world a chance to develop in some way that's necessary for the campaign, but which may have been prevented by the PCs if they were at large. Even if it has only been a few days, you can use the imprisonment of the characters to move the plot along.

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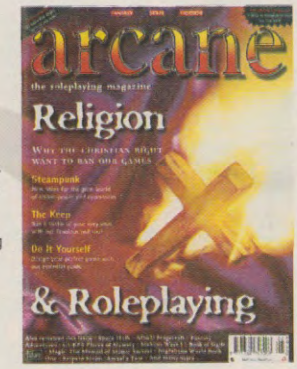
Issue 2 explored *AD&D: Skills & Powers*, previewed 1996's big releases, interviewed Richard Garfield (*Magic*'s inventor) and starred The Golden Dragon Inn, a 16-page Encounters special.

Issue 3 had a complete, free RPG called *Skool Roolz*, reviewed *Cybergeneration* and *Warhammer Fantasy Battle CD-ROM*, had a feature on making your characters more quirky and featured Mr Smith's Trans-dimensional Emporium as our Encounter.

Issue 4 explained roleplaying for beginners, discussed the role of acting in gaming, reviewed *MIddle Earth: The Wizards*, *Legend of the Five Rings* and *Night Below*, while Stormburg, the flying extra-planar city materialised in the Encounters section.

Issue 5 had Richard Garfield's thoughts on *Netrunner*, advice on wars, a feature on the roleplaying scene in Japan and reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, *Don't Look Back*, *Mage: The Ascension* and *Heresy*, as well as having The Train pull into the Encounters section.



Issue 6 explained why the Christian right want to ban roleplaying games, took a look at the strange worlds of Steampunk, and reviewed *Netrunner*, the best card game since *Magic*, *GURPS Goblins* and *Space Hulk 2nd Edition*. Oh, and we gave you your very own Keep by way of the Encounter.

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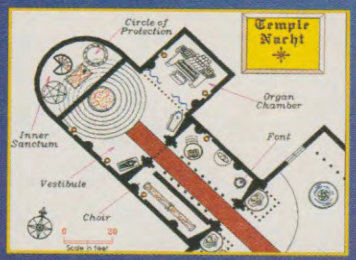

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THE MONTH IN GAMES

Are you feeling paranoid? We are...

AND WE'VE GOT GOOD reason. We've been playing the excellent *Conspiracy X* all month, and we've not stopped looking over our shoulders since the very first session. NME's new roleplaying system is definitely the best we've seen this year – check out Andy's review to discover why. And after that, read up on why we think *Mythos* from Chaosium, the new PC version of *Space Hulk* from Games Workshop/Electronic Arts and *Faiths and Avatars* are all worthy of our praise.

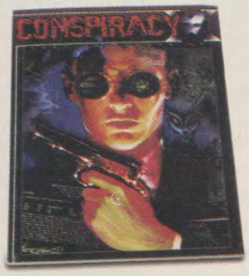
Our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. If it's praised in **arcane** you know you can buy it with confidence.

All our reviews are by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games you do. This definitely is *the* place for definitive reviews of games and expansions.

Oh, and a note about prices. A lot of stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by a number of different distributors, so the prices we've given must be viewed as guidelines only.

Pick of the month

"Overflowing with ideas and inspiration"



Conspiracy X
Page 56

"The closest thing to roleplaying in a CCG"

Mythos
Page 60

The Icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Roleplaying systems

Collectable card games and expansions

Board games, miniature systems

Dice games and expansions

Computer games and utilities

Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.
Score 9/10 Excellent; a classic. Highly recommended.
Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.
Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.
Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.
Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.
Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.
Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.
Score 2/10 Very poor; should be avoided.
Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

The index

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Conspira

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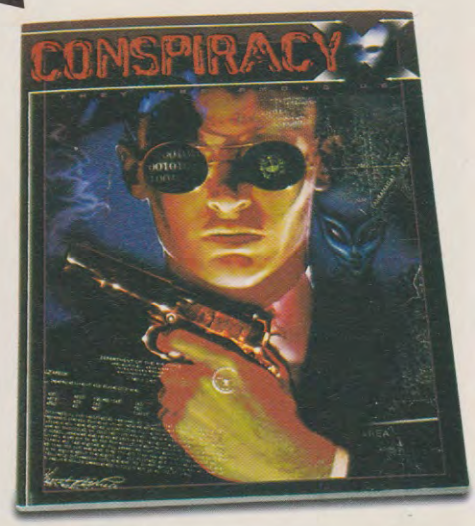


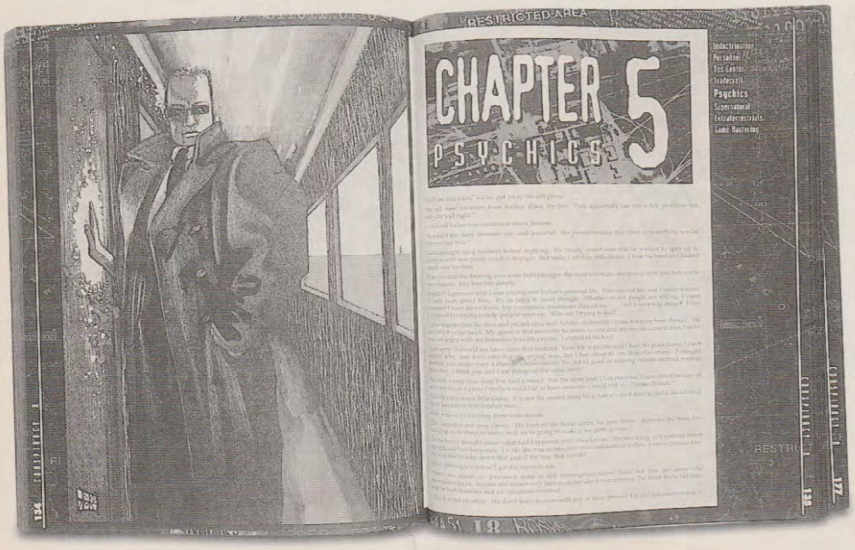
Enter a world of lies, deceptions and cover-ups, where the truth is the most dangerous thing of all...

Conspiracy X seems set to become one of the best-supported new roleplaying systems around. NME is already working on a series of supplements for the game, beginning with a referee's screen next month and followed shortly by the *Aegis Handbook*. Look out for full reviews in coming issues of **arcane**.

Hardly ever has there been a television series as well suited to gaming as *The X-Files*. As well as being phenomenally successful and triggering a resurgence of interest in UFOs and aliens among the general public, the show's structure, background and main premise translate perfectly to a roleplaying campaign. It's hardly surprising that *The X-Files* has caused a wave of interest in modern day investigation-style games.

The influence of *The X-Files* is clear in *Conspiracy X*, the first roleplaying game from New Millennium Entertainment. However, while the game certainly takes some of its inspiration from show, it is much more than a mere rip-off.

"Skillfully interweaves just enough fact and fiction to create a background that's frighteningly credible."



Conspiracy X is set in a version of the modern world that, on the surface at least, is identical to ours. Lurking behind this facade of normality, though, are terrible truths that make the beliefs of even the most paranoid conspiracy freaks seem tame in comparison. In this world, not only do conspiracies exist, but the players are part of one.

As member of Aegis, a secret organisation concealed within the United States government, the players are dedicated to protecting humanity from the threat posed by both supernatural and extraterrestrial forces. But Aegis is not the only group at work within the government. The Black Book and its allies in the military-industrial complex support alien activities on Earth, offering aid with human abductions and experimentation in return for knowledge and advanced technology.

Hidden behind their cloaks of secrecy, Aegis and The Black Book are engaged in a clandestine war of covert operations that has been raging for nearly 50 years. Player characters in *Conspiracy X* must make use of every resource at their disposal to oppose The Black Book and its inhuman allies. The fate of humanity will be determined their actions.

Unlike so many roleplaying games, *Conspiracy X* manages to deal with psychic powers in both a practical and original way.

Behind the lies

A 224-page softcover book, *Conspiracy X* is divided into eight chapters, each of which

acy X

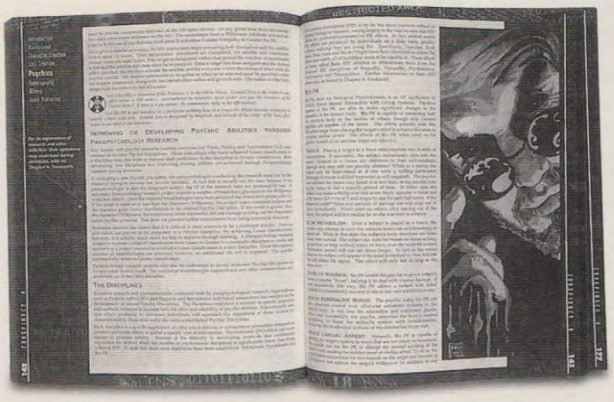
begins with part of a short story that describes a typical Aegis operation. The design is attractive throughout, with clear fonts and effective use of icons and sidebars. Illustration is sparse, and of variable quality, but even the bad stuff manages to capture the correct atmosphere.

Things kick off with *Indoctrination*, which contains the usual 'what is a roleplaying game' and 'example of play' sections. We then move on to 'the world according to *Conspiracy X*' which outlines the history of Aegis, The Black Book and the extraterrestrial presence on Earth. The key to any good conspiracy theory is that it should be just plausible enough to give you pause for thought and insidious enough in its scope to make you worry. *Conspiracy X* succeeds admirably on both counts. Beginning in 1933, the timeline skillfully interweaves just enough fact and fiction to create a background that's frighteningly credible. Combined with the later explanations of psychic powers and the supernatural, the setting created is one of the game's greatest strengths – even the most jaded referees will find themselves overflowing with ideas and inspiration simply by skipping through the book.

Who are you?

Personnel, the second chapter, looks at characters and their abilities. *Conspiracy X* uses a points-based generation system similar to but much simpler than that of *GURPS* or *Hero*, and players start with 100 points to spend on improving their character's attributes and traits.

Characters in *Conspiracy X* are rated from 1 to 5 in seven basic attributes. Strength and Size determine a character's build and resistance to physical injury; Agility and Reflexes rate his co-ordination and speed; Intelligence and Willpower determine his analytical ability and strength of mind, while Perception combines the sharpness of the senses with the ability to



interpret what is sensed. In addition, there are two 'special' attributes. Luck is split into ratings for good and bad, while Influence represents the agent's power and authority in his 'cover' occupation. All characters begin as 'average' people, rated 3 in the basic attributes, 2/12 in Luck and with a single point of Influence. Points can be spent to increase these numbers, or gained by accepting lower ones in other areas.

Because nearly all Aegis operatives are recruited while working for some kind of government agency, and most continue in their chosen careers waiting for situations that require Aegis attention, the next step is to decide which agency or organisation the character works for. The career chosen determines which skills and training options are available to the character, as well as what the character can achieve by using his Influence to 'pull strings'. There's a wide variety of choices available, from CIA agents to NASA astronauts.

Once the career has been chosen, skills, training and other traits can be purchased. Like attributes, skills are rated from 1 to 5. Training, on the other hand, covers areas where all that's important is whether a character can do something or not – for example SCUBA diving or parachute jumping. Finally, traits are miscellaneous special abilities or weaknesses that a character may possess. Examples of these include psychic powers and an overwhelming fear of spiders.

Although points-based systems are generally slightly more complex than other character generation systems, the simple rules used in *Conspiracy X* help to minimise difficulties and keep things from getting too complicated. Despite the overriding simplicity, though, there a number of neat ideas here and, once again, just reading through many of the available careers and traits will be sufficient to inspire the creation of many characters.

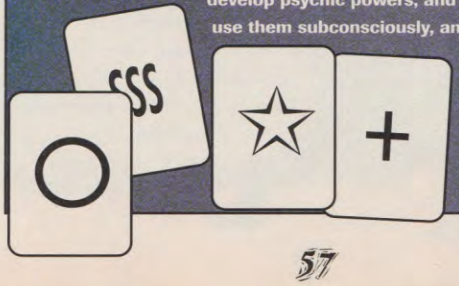
All in the mind

Over the last year there has been a wave of TV documentaries and magazine articles concerning the CIA's secret research into mind control and 'psychic spies' during the Cold War. According to the recently de-classified documents and reports, despite years of work and millions of dollars, none of the projects were successful.

According to *Conspiracy X*, these 'revelations' are part of a planned program of disinformation. The CIA's research was, in fact, so successful that it came to the notice of Aegis, which took control of the projects. The results demonstrated that nearly all humans possess the potential to develop psychic powers, and often use them subconsciously, and led to breakthroughs in the training and utilisation of these abilities.

In game terms this means that almost any agent has the ability to perform limited feats of ESP, while some may already be trained in one or more of the recognised psychic disciplines. All such powers are resolved not with dice but Zener cards, using a modified version of the Rhine test popular in early research into telepathy. The referee shuffles the five cards; the player declares what they are attempting to achieve and names one of the symbols. Depending on the character's abilities, one to three cards are drawn, and if any display the nominated symbol, the power is used successfully.

Yes, it's a gimmick, but it's a simple and innovative one that makes a break from dice rolling and works well during play. Unfortunately, while the rulebook contains a sheet of the card diagrams that can be photocopied and pasted onto the faces of other cards, these tend to wear out quite quickly, and finding real cards isn't easy.



They are among us

ETs abroad...

In the dark world of *Conspiracy X*, aliens are very real. In the 50 years since it's founding, Aegis has come to the conclusion that at least three distinct types of extraterrestrial are active on Earth. However, despite continued efforts by Aegis operatives, little is actually known of their capabilities, motivations and aims.

The Greys

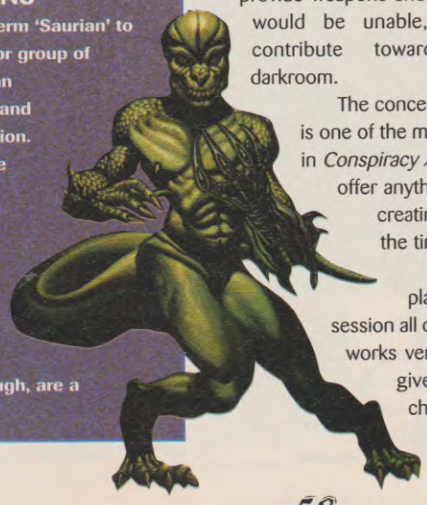
The most commonly sighted alien race, Greys stand between four and five feet tall, with smooth grey skin, large heads and black eyes. Greys seem to possess strong psychic powers and their science is based on associated principles, although they appear fascinated by human technology. Their motivations remain unclear. Although they are apparently responsible for most reports of human and animal abductions, Greys are generally timid and never directly violent. The Greys have had wide contact with The Black Book, although the nature of their relationship is unknown.

The Atlanteans

The Atlanteans are the most mysterious of all the alien races – their very existence continues to be a matter of dispute. First-hand encounters with the race remain extremely rare, and normally their presence can only be inferred from circumstantial evidence. In the few substantiated sightings there have been, Atlanteans appear to be normal, albeit attractive, humans. The strongest evidence of their extraterrestrial nature lies in their technology, which appears to be highly advanced and based on the principles of nanotechnology.

The Saurians

Aegis uses the term 'Saurian' to refer to a race or group of races of reptilian appearance. The Saurians are very secretive and reluctant to interact with the general population. Aegis has uncovered a great deal of evidence that the Saurians have, however, forged extensive ties with The Black Book and are aiding them in technological research. Through the Black Book's connections with the military-industrial complex, many developments have been incorporated into mainstream US Military programs, such as the 'stealth' aircraft. The Saurians' aims, though, are a matter of conjecture.



Welcome to the Batcave

Aegis is organised in a 'cell' structure similar to that reputedly used by the CIA and many terrorist organisations. Each cell is composed of a small group of operatives who work as an independent team. Because little or no contact occurs between cells, if an agent is captured he can only implicate the other members of his cell, and the security of the organisation as a whole remains intact. When a new cell is created, the members pool their resources and influence to create a secret base of operations. Chapter three, *Ops Centre*, details this process and the available options.

In many ways creating a base resembles character generation, but while each player creates his own character individually, the group as a whole must co-operate to build an effective base that will provide them with adequate resources. The majority of this chapter is taken up with a list of the possible resources, which are divided into Location, Facilities, Staff, Equipment and Special Resources. Each character has a certain number of points to spend, depending on his Influence attribute, and can only spend these points on certain items, depending on his career and contacts. For example, a character from a military background might be able to provide weapons and ammunition, but he would be unable, for instance, to contribute towards equipping a darkroom.

The concept of the 'ops centre' is one of the most original elements in *Conspiracy X* – very few systems offer anything similar. Although creating a centre adds to the time it takes for a new group to get playing, often taking a session all of its own, the system works very well in practice. It gives the players a chance to get together and work as a group, and the extensive list of options helps to give them a feel for the nature of the game. Of course, the referee could always speed things up by providing a 'ready-made' base, but the players would miss out on an interesting and challenging part of the game.

The nuts and bolts

The fourth chapter of *Conspiracy X*, *Tradecraft*, explains the specifics of the rules. The system itself is very simple, and is based around a standard test. To resolve a task, the relevant skill or attribute is compared to a difficulty number (which varies from 1 to 6) set by the referee. If the character's ability is higher than the difficulty, he succeeds. If the numbers are equal, the player must roll seven or less on two six-sided dice – a Normal test – while if the difficulty is one higher than the ability, the player must roll four or less to succeed – a Hard test. Tasks with a difficulty of two or more higher than the character's ability cannot be performed by that character.

In most cases, such as using a skill, the target number for the test is modified by one of the character's attributes. For example, the Small Arms: Pistol skill is modified by Agility. If a character has an above average Agility of 4, tests are modified by +1 (so a Normal test requires eight or less, and a Hard test five or less).

"At once quick and elegant, while still allowing for an impressive range of options and level of detail."

In addition, in the case of automatic success or failure, the player or the referee may request that the character make a Luck test. Two dice are rolled, and if the result is equal to or greater than the character's Good Luck, they succeed (or succeed brilliantly, in the case of an automatic success). If the result is less than or equal to the character's Bad Luck, though, they fail (or fail miserably for an automatic failure).

After explaining these basics, the rest of the chapter then examines a number of variations and specific cases, including combat, damage and healing. Combat, in particular, is handled well: it includes one of the best hand-to-hand systems around and is suitably deadly (remember those automatic success rules).

However, the rules are not without some problems. Beyond the Luck test there's no way of judging the degree of success or failure of an action, and the damage rules in particular can be confusing

to use without some thorough reading. Despite this, *Conspiracy X*'s rules succeed admirably in striking a difficult balance, being at once quick and elegant while still allowing for an impressive range of options and level of detail.

Uncovering the Truth

The next three chapters of *Conspiracy X* deal in turn with psychic powers, the supernatural and extraterrestrials. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the game is the way in which these areas are integrated with the background, forming a convincing and internally consistent game world. It would have been all too easy for *Conspiracy X* to end up as a mish-mash of ideas and images, the bane of many modern-day horror roleplaying systems.

The final chapter is aimed squarely at the referee, and is the only one to contain information that players really shouldn't be aware of. As well as carrying a discussion of how to run *Conspiracy X* games, and suggestions for the type of missions that a cell might face, it also offers advice about using The Black Book, aliens, and the supernatural in the game, including some information that Aegis, and therefore the players, do not know. If anything, this just goes to reinforce the strength of the background, and how much work has obviously gone into developing this side of the game.

On the Dark Side

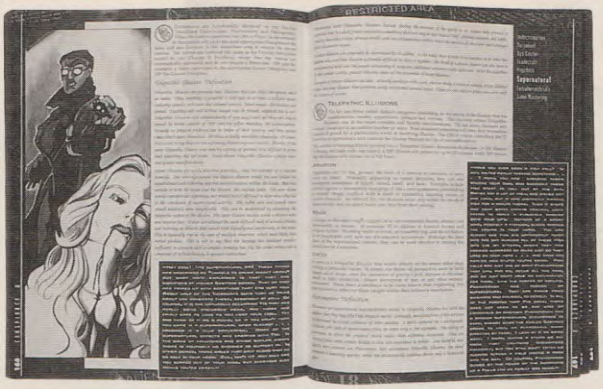
Conspiracy X isn't perfect, however. In addition to the problems with the rules already mentioned, there's no index (although the contents page is very thorough), and the book has more than its fair share of typos and missing words. Although the game comes with an errata sheet (which, interestingly, is the only place that tells you that six-sided dice should be used – you can work it out, but the rules never actually tell you), it's far from being comprehensive. Still, none of this is unforgivable, especially considering that this is NME's first roleplaying game.

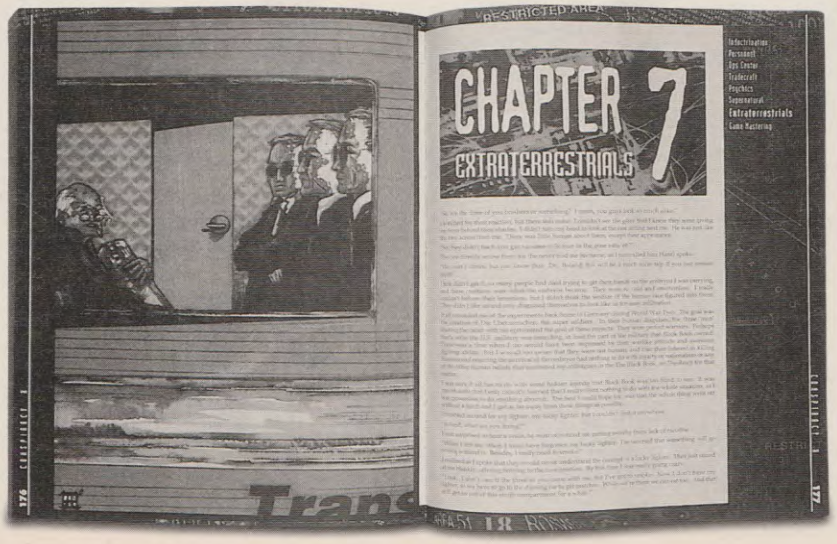
What is slightly more concerning, and could cause significant problems for less experienced referees, is the lack of detail about Aegis itself. In a game with such a strong, well-designed background, this deficiency is even more noticeable. For example, the rules inform you that Aegis is organised into cells without ever clearly explaining how such a structure works, and unless you've read a lot of espionage novels you're not likely to have any idea.

Again, this is far from a fatal flaw, and the relevant information will almost certainly be included in the forthcoming *Aegis Handbook* supplement, but you can't help feeling that it really should be part of the main rules.

Still, *Conspiracy X* is the most impressive first roleplaying release in a long time, and it's a great game. It combines a setting and style that will be familiar enough for players and referees to easily understand with an incredibly detailed and atmospheric background, clear, simple rules and an impressive range of original and clever ideas. On the strength of this, New Millennium Entertainment seems set to become a force to be reckoned with. Highly recommended.

Andy Butcher





One of the best things about *Conspiracy X* is the sheer amount of inspiration referees can find lying about. Almost any newspaper headline or TV documentary can be worked into a plot, and that's not including the wealth of stuff floating around on the Internet (just take a look at the alt.conspiracy newsgroup).

The more extreme uses to which certain characters can put their Influence attribute include calling orbital strikes from secret Star Wars satellites or requesting the use of an Aurora, a prototype aircraft developed by Aegis that combines cutting edge technology with systems derived from alien designs...

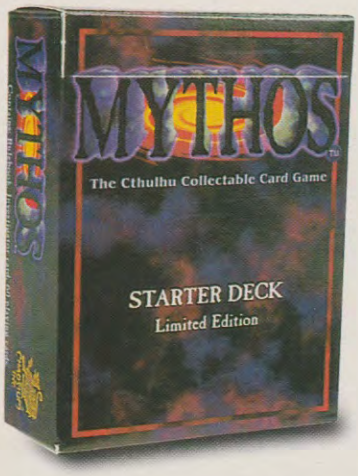
And the players said...

STEVE: "Succeeds convincingly in areas where so many roleplaying systems fail."

MARYANNE: "The influence of *The X-Files* is obvious, but *Conspiracy X* takes things several steps further."

PAUL: "I *must* have a satellite weapons system. Can't wait for the supplements..."

JAMES: "Brilliant atmosphere, great rules, and the best background I've come across in ages."



Mythos

A collectable card game | £6.99 starter deck | Out now

£2.25 13-card booster | Chaosium | 001 510 547 7681

can you remain sane enough to survive a trip to Lovecraft country?

The game features a fairly large dollop of humour – one of the tomes you can discover is the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook, and there's an excellent card called Children have Nightmares that is illustrated by childish illustrations of Cthulhu himself.

Other than good old *Dungeons & Dragons*, if there's one game that has dominated my role-playing life it's *Call of Cthulhu (CoC)*. I'd wager that many of you would say the same. The worlds and creatures Lovecraft created lend themselves perfectly to a roleplaying game, and Chaosium pulled it off almost perfectly. Now we have *Mythos* – the CCG version, if you will, of *CoC*, from the makers of the original tabletop game.

Before I launch into the structure of play, I must first dwell on what for me is the most important element of this card game – an element that I have yet to have come across in any other CCG. And this is going to rile many of you. *Mythos* actually encourages roleplaying – yes, *roleplaying* – during play. There is a narrative element which manifests itself through description and storytelling as cards are played and as actions are performed. You find yourself saying, "On my way to the old mill ruins, I meet Wilbur Whately, who gives me Paracelsus' sword," instead of, say, "I'm going to tap one mountain to cast a three-point lightning bolt at your carrion ants." As more cards are laid down, the story develops, resembling a *CoC* session far more than *Magic* does a game of *AD&D*.

The reason why narrative is so important in *Mythos* is that the rules demand it. To win a game you must complete an adventure. Within your deck of 52 or more cards, you bury one or maybe two Adventure cards. These each have a short story written on them, for example: "It just seems that things go from bad to worse. During a POWERFUL STORM, travel to THREE different LOCATIONS along the MISKATONIC VALLEY, using at least ONE TRAVEL BY CAR and finding refuge in a nearby CHURCH." You must get cards into play that satisfy the conditions of the story (the cards needed are those that are capitalised in the adventure text).

Getting cards into play involves arranging them around your investigator card, which lies face-up on the table before you. You can travel to locations either by walking, or by using special travel cards (such as the Travel by Car card mentioned above). Once at your destination, you can meet allies (providing they live in that area), pick up artifacts and tomes (providing the location contains them), and even summon monsters to pit against your opponent come the end of the Round. All the while you've got to try to prevent yourself from becoming insane (if you do, the game ends immediately and your opponent wins). Almost every item and tome that you discover, every spell you find in a tome, every creature that you summon, some of the locations you visit, and a few of the people you meet cost you Sanity Points – your 'life' in the game. Also, combat, which involves pitting your summoned creatures and chosen allies against those of your opponent, potentially costs you sanity (if your opponent's creatures manage to penetrate your defences).

"Without doubt the closest thing to roleplaying in a CCG I've seen."

You can counter this loss of sanity by visiting sanatoriums, by travelling to see psychiatrists (though note that if you go to see Freud in Vienna, you may come away with a couple of phobias), and by completing your adventure. Once this latter objective has been met, the players (the game easily accommodates several players) add up their remaining sanity points, and whoever has the highest wins. Or, at least, this is the case in the standard game, for there is also a Campaign game, which involves completing more than one adventure and scoring Adventure points (which vary depending on the relative difficulty of the adventure undertaken). This

In a somewhat unique move, Chaosium have released the first expansion set for *Mythos – Expeditions Of Miskatonic University* – along with the game itself. The boosters contain a mix of the starter deck set and new cards with a European setting.

Campaign game is perhaps the most entertaining variety, but the completion of a whole 25-point campaign is almost impossible, at least to begin with – your sanity tends to flee long before the campaign is complete.

Deck-building is far easier than with many other card games – your chosen adventures dictate which cards you should include in your deck. Because the cards stipulated on the adventure are often pretty specific, to complete some of the longer ones you're going to need some rarer cards, and that means buying plenty of boosters. The Dunwich Horror adventure, which scores you a massive 15 points in a campaign game, requires cards that we didn't have in the 700 or so we used to test the game. Having said that, this is a game that you can play quite easily with a couple of starter decks – each starter contains a paper Adventure slip that requires generic cards to complete, just in case your starter doesn't contain sufficient cards to complete one of the 'proper' adventures.

Because of the narrative element, and because the game is based around the completion of adventures, *Mythos* is without doubt the closest thing to roleplaying in a CCG I've seen. It bears a resemblance to *Middle-earth: The Wizards* in that certain people and items can only be found at given locations, but it's a less complex game, making the pace of play that much faster. It's an enjoyable diversion from *CoC*, and a game that I can recommend to those of you who appreciate Lovecraft's works and have some experience of *CoC* roleplaying.

Paul Pettengale

Mythos, like many games, requires the use of counters – in this case to keep track of a player's sanity. The authors of the game suggest marbles, just so as a player, upon the loss of his final Sanity Point, can shout: "I've lost my marbles!". Well, it made us laugh.

And the players said...

JON: "It's okay, but I'd rather be playing *Netrunner*."

STEVE: "Great! Conjures up that *Call of Cthulhu* feel perfectly."

ANDY: "Good stuff, but not unless you've played *Call of Cthulhu*."

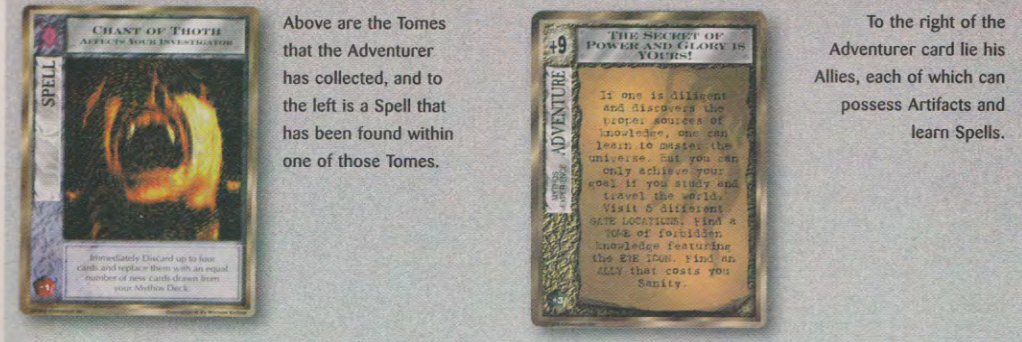
Score 8/10

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

Playing *Mythos* is all about telling a story. And you tell this tale by laying down your cards before you, progressing from Location to Location, meeting Allies and finding artifacts and tomes along the way...

All of the cards you play in *Mythos* are arranged around your Adventurer double-sized card. The most important pile of cards – the Story deck – is immediately to the left as pictured here, with the top card displaying your current location. Left of the Story deck is the Mythos Threat, which contains all the monsters the Adventurer has summoned, face-down, ready for combat at the end of the turn.

Above are the Tomes that the Adventurer has collected, and to the left is a Spell that has been found within one of those Tomes.



To the right of the Adventurer card lie his Allies, each of which can possess Artifacts and learn Spells.

Space Hulk: Vengeanc

A tactical combat game for the PC £44.99

Electronic Arts 01753 549442 Out now

Those nasty genestealers are back, and this time the Blood Angels are aiming to give them a kicking...

Perhaps one of the most frantic and atmospheric boardgames ever, the original *Space Hulk* from Games Workshop pitted fanatical Space Marines against alien Genestealers in close combat aboard vast, derelict spacecraft. It was a great game, but when Electronic Arts announced that they were producing a computer version there was a mixed reaction. After all, at that time, most boardgame conversions were little more than straight copies of the originals, with unimpressive graphics and awkward controls.

"With a huge Genestealer snarling in your face, it's easy to get a bit carried away."

The close-combat sequences are frighteningly fast and intense – just as they should be.

The fears of PC-owning *Space Hulk* fans were ungrounded, however. The PC version of *Space Hulk* was superb, capturing the feel and atmosphere of the boardgame while using first-person 3D and real-time action to enhance the gameplay.

Now, several years later, Games Workshop have re-released *Space Hulk* (reviewed **arcane** 6). Although the production values are much higher, by allowing the Marine player as much time as necessary to complete turns (in the original board game, the Marine player had to work under a strict time limit) the game loses a great deal of its atmosphere.

Luckily, the same is not true of Electronic Arts' new version of *Space Hulk* for the PC. *Vengeance of the Blood Angels* is superior to its predecessor in almost every respect. The main reason for this is that the structure of the game itself has remained largely unchanged and, rather than trying to 're-invent the wheel', the designers have stuck with what works and improved upon it.

Vengeance of the Blood Angels puts you in charge of squads of Terminator Space Marines charged with completing a variety of missions. At the start of each game you have two main choices: to play a single mission or play a campaign. In the former you choose from a list of available missions. Once you've decided which to try, you receive a briefing and the mission proper begins.

The game is viewed and controlled from two main screens – a first-person 3D view through the eyes of a Marine, and a

e Of The Blood Angels

Both Space Marines and Genestealers are smoothly animated and highly detailed.

top-down 'scanner' view of the entire game area. When you're moving and fighting in the 3D view the game proceeds in real time, with the computer controlling the other Space Marines. At any time you can switch to the scanner view, which freezes the action for a short amount of time, and issue orders to the other Marines. Once you've finished, or this 'freeze time' runs out, it's back to real time, and your allowance of 'freeze time' slowly regenerates.

Campaign play is similar, but the missions must be played in order. Furthermore, you begin life as a lowly squad member, and must follow the orders given to you. As the campaign proceeds you are promoted to squad leader, and become responsible for issuing commands. However, you cannot switch between the different Marines (as in the single mission game), but must simply give orders from the scanner screen.

The first and most noticeable improvement over the original *Space Hulk* computer game is *Vengeance of the Blood Angels*' presentation. The graphics and sound are very good indeed, with fluidly animated Genestealers and Marines, and a wide variety of different areas, from rock-like caves to gleaming high-tech corridors. Particularly impressive is the close combat – with a huge Genestealer snarling in your face, it's easy to get a bit carried away. Likewise, hearing your fellow Marines shouting warnings over the radio, the heavy thumping of their bolters, the strange sounds of the hulk itself and the screaming of the Genestealers as they die adds immeasurably to the atmosphere.

The scope of the game has also been increased. As well as hordes of Genestealers, your trusty squads must face twisted Chaos Marines, Genestealer Patriarchs and many other vicious baddies in a variety of missions, from basic 'survive for X minutes' types to complex exploration and retrieval affairs.

Finally, both your foes and fellow Marines benefit from a notable increase in intelligence on behalf of the computer. Although you can now rely more on the other members of your squad to carry out their orders, you have to pay more attention to exactly what the enemy is doing, or you'll be swamped by a cunning plan of attack.

All of these refinements and additions complement and improve upon *Space Hulk*'s greatest strength: atmosphere. Everything combines to make it a thoroughly absorbing and intense game. A lot was made of the atmosphere of id Software's *Doom* when it was released. Well, *Space Hulk* was released a lot earlier, and was just as frantic and tense. *Vengeance of the Blood Angels*, with its new graphics, better sound and more convincing artificial intelligence, is even more adrenaline-packed.

Andy Butcher

Score 8/10

United We Stand

As well as its impressive range of single player options, *Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels* supports multi-player games. By connecting with other PCs over a network, you and your mates can team up as members of the same squad of Blood Angels, facing off against the ceaseless hordes of Genestealers with smoking bolters in hand.

One player remains nominally 'in charge' as the squad sergeant, and can give orders to other players via the same system used to direct the computer marines. However, players can choose whether or not to obey the leader's commands, which may lead to some, erm, interesting situations (and much gnashing of teeth from the other players).

If anything, the multi-player version of *Space Hulk* creates an even more impressive atmosphere than the single-player game, and works remarkably well. Of course, not everybody has access to the kind of network needed to really get this to work, but those that do are in for a very real treat.

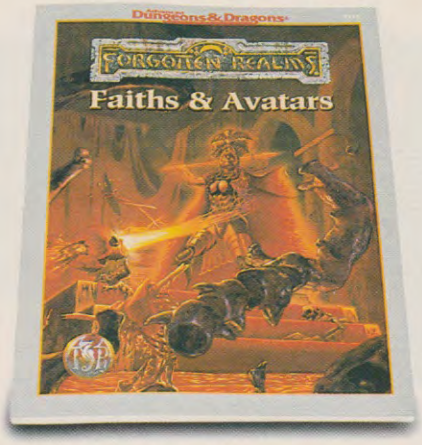
Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels began life as a simple conversion of the original PC game onto the 3DO. After the programmers started playing around with the game, though, they realised that they'd improved it so much that it was worth converting back to the PC as a sequel!

An *AD&D Forgotten Realms* campaign expansion

Faiths & Ava

£11.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

It could be called a new Bible, but...



On parade: all of the religions outlined in *Faiths and Avatars* demand their priests wear certain garb for special religious events and rituals.

Julia Martin and Eric L Boyd deserve medals for what they've achieved with *Faiths & Avatars*. They probably also deserve professional psychiatric help for even attempting to codify and clarify the twisted theology of Abeir-Toril. The resultant work is exhaustive. It's also exhausting.

The main purpose of *Faiths & Avatars* is to fully list, rank, rate, explain and detail everything about every god in the Faerûnian pantheon ever – including those who are currently dead. It ignores the non-human deities, but by the time you've waded through this weighty work you'll be glad it does. Some 45 incredibly detailed descriptions, four new priest sub-classes and a (hilarious) nine-page cleric fashion show are your guarantee of value.

"It's faith, however, that really makes gods great and this book good."

The word 'avatar' derives from the Sanskrit for 'descent' – the two most famous Christian examples being Jesus and a certain serpent.

After a remarkably concise (if somewhat brain-mangling) intro, *Faiths & Avatars* dips straight into what makes each god worth worshipping. This is no *Deities & Demigods*-style glorified *Monster Manual* – in which gods were dismissed with single paragraph descriptions, a pretty picture and an outrageous set of stats – but a collection of information so thorough that it makes your brain hurt.

Predictably, each god is furnished with descriptions, statistics and deadpan personal histories telling which gods they hate, who they support and how much attention they pay to their followers. All very solid, and just what you'd expect.

Yet this isn't the point – the title is, after all, *Faiths & Avatars*. Following each god's entry is a descriptions of its Avatar – the god's manifestation on Earth and the form that adventurers are 'most likely' to encounter. Oddly, these are short descriptions but, since they're backed by the in-depth god info, there's more than enough information here to create truly terrifying encounters for those characters who are sufficiently cocky (or stupid) to tackle deities head-to-head.

It's faith, however, that really makes gods great and this book good. Ordinarily, playing a cleric character is difficult because there's precious little rules-based help in *AD&D* for those trying to take their characters beyond the role of magical nurses. The only experience most of us

tars

Of course, it's supremely unlikely that any cleric-class character would actually go adventuring dressed like this.

The game of the gods

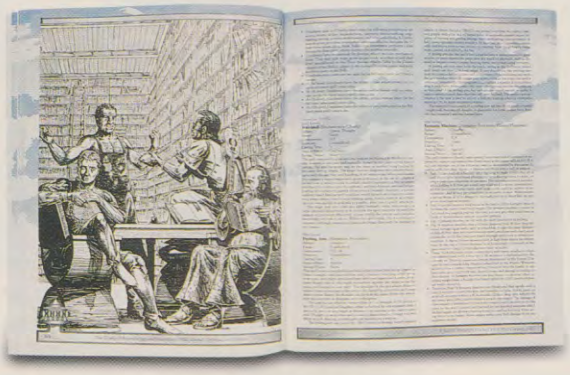
Football, sad though it may seem, is the best metaphor for the theology of Abeir-Toril. *Faiths & Avatars* (the FA?) sorts, ranks and rates the 'powers' at work in the Forgotten Realms into Greater Powers, Intermediate Powers, Lesser Powers and Demi-Powers. Just think of these as Premier League, Endsleigh League, Football Conference and Sunday-morning pub teams.

Premier League gods have thousands of followers, great power and everybody, even if they don't worship them, knows them, while Sunday Pub Team deities are lucky to have 38 people and a dog watching their games.

Life for the gods, though, is far from fixed. Acting like some FA supremo, the Over-Power promotes and demotes powers according to their performance. So, Newcastle-like Lesser or Demi-Powers can climb the greasy pole to become Greater powers if they continue to increase their 'fan base' and play well away from home (i.e. defeat rival gods in battle or intrigue).

What's more, the Lesser and Demi-powers also serve as training grounds for up and coming priests for the Greater Powers – a sort of holy transfer market. By working in concert with their more potent allies these more lowly gods hope to gain favour – i.e. get a player on loan – if it will help strengthen another's power base.

But no matter how many alliances they make, all gods remain rivals. So when events like the Godswar – an FA Cup that comes round every few millennia – crop up, it's every god for himself because nobody wants to get knocked out in the third round!



have of religion is the modern Christian model, which is of no use when your day-to-day activities include direct physical violence. It's even less help when your priest worships a god who personifies evil, cruelty and downright nastiness.

The faiths section for each god absorbs at least a page. Detailing the church structure, dogma, day-to-day activities, major centres of worship, affiliated religious orders, priestly vestments, adventuring garb, holy days and important ceremonies of each, *Faiths & Avatars* provides players with loads of inspiration and plenty of guidance for roleplaying.

One of a god's most important roles, of course, is to provide spells. It's in response to clerics' daily prayers that they regularly influence the game. Here *Faiths & Avatars* helps players by offering specific extra spells to the various gods' followers. Naturally, these reflect the individual god's nature and spheres of influence, adding further power to the player trying to properly roleplay a devout worshipper of any particular deity.

The final accomplishment of *Faiths & Avatars* is almost dismissed in an appendix-like form in the last ten pages. Four priest sub-classes are outlined: crusaders, monks, mystics and shamen. Although these descriptions are a little too concise for their own good, the sub-classes they deal with are welcome additions that work well with the *Faiths & Avatars* system. It's especially nice to see the return of the *Oriental Adventures*-style monk.

Aside from the sheer size of the subject matter, there are two major problems with *Faiths & Avatars*. Functionally, the print's too small and the background tints are too dark, which makes reading a chore and cross-referencing difficult. In addition, it's stylistically po-faced, overly pious and almost puritanical about the subject matter. There's no excitement or enjoyment to be had here.

Faiths & Avatars is scarily serious and seriously scary. Personally, I'd be terrified of implementing it in a campaign for fear of having missed some vital link and consequently undermining both my campaign and the Faerûnian pantheon. But if you've got powerful characters running around one of the Forgotten Realms you'd be doing your players a disservice if you didn't toy with this hi-octane, high-power playing aid.

Reading *Faiths & Avatars* is a real struggle, but you'll plough on because the ideas are good, the research thorough, and because it offers a lot to any *Forgotten Realms* campaign. *Faiths & Avatars is* the bible for the *Forgotten Realms*. Unfortunately, just like many real-world religions, it takes itself far too seriously.

Trenton Webb

Score 8/10

The level of detail which *Faiths and Avatars* enters into is quite staggering. Everything is here a ref' could need.

A scenario pack for *Call of Cthulhu*

In the Shadows

£7.95 Chaosium 001 510 547 7681 Out now

Don't look too closely: you don't know what you might find...

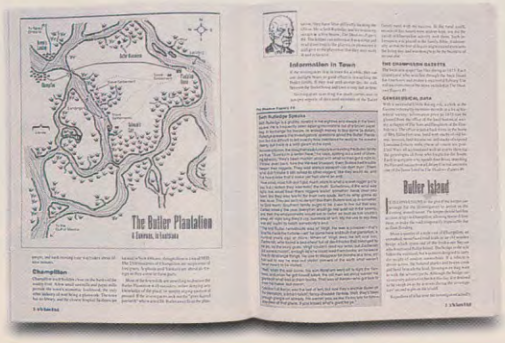
Occasionally a scenario comes along that actually inspires me to dust off a game I've not played in a while (I've been running a *Don't Look Back* campaign over the last few months, so my regular *CoC* sessions have lapsed somewhat recently) and to start refereeing it again. Such was the case when I read through *Devil's Hole*, the first of the three scenarios contained in this new collection from Chaosium.

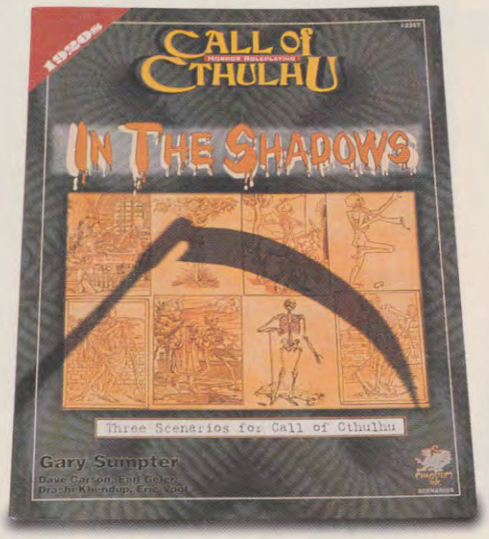
Devil's Hole is pretty straightforward so far as plot goes (a 'friend' of the players disappears shortly after taking a trip to a Scottish town where he was to claim the estate of his recently deceased uncle), as is the investigation that follows (strange things, as they say, are afoot in the MacBain ancestral home). The players visit the old house, stay for a while in Aberdeen, and then take to the North Sea to resolve the adventure (for the time being, at least).

But it is the range of characters and the wealth of roleplaying opportunities for the referee that make this adventure particularly attractive – these people have been well thought out; their personalities are shining through, off the page, even before a single session has begun. Excellent stuff.

The other two scenarios, *In the Shadows of Death* and *The Song of Spheres*, are also well written. English characters will have to take a trip across the Pond – to Louisiana for *In the Shadows of Death* and to New England for *The Song of Spheres*. The first has the investigators uncovering cultist activity on a cotton plantation, and the second (which reminded me in tone of TED Klein's superb short story *Man with a Black Horn*) sublimely manages to blend opera and even jazz music with the *Cthulhu* mythos, producing unforgettable results.

In fact, the only major gripe about this book is

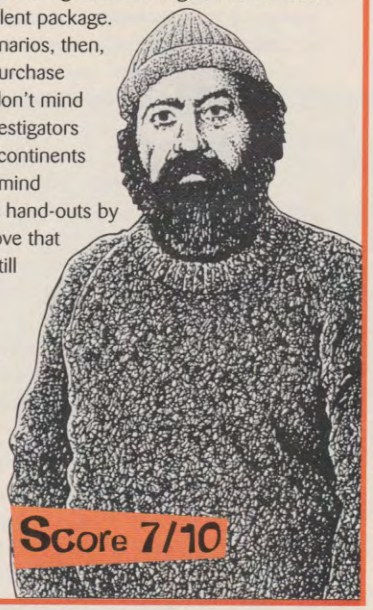




with the way the hand-outs have been printed (and there are many of these, all essential for the running of the scenarios). Instead of being collected together at the end of the book so you can cut them out, they're printed throughout the main text. This would have been fine – photocopier to the rescue – *but* they're all printed on a grey background that obscures the text when photocopied (even with a high-quality copier). This is an almost unforgivable oversight, and mars an otherwise excellent package.

These scenarios, then, are worthy of purchase providing you don't mind having your investigators travel between continents (and you don't mind copying out the hand-outs by hand). They prove that Chaosium are still capable of producing fine material, using some fresh approaches, all this time after *CoC*'s original release.

Paul Pettengale



Score 7/10

The Fragile Path: Testaments of the First Cabal

A *Mage: The Ascension* supplement

£6.99 White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 Out now

This is a curious little book, but a very beautiful one. It tells the tale of the First Cabal, a group of nine mages who opposed the Technocracy in its early days, while it was still known as the Order of Reason. Hovering just short of being a fully fledged novel, it is not really a supplement either.

It's presented as an almost academic work by an ancient mage of the Order of Hermes who knew the central characters 400 years ago. Disgusted with the withering of interest in the First Cabal, he has gathered the writings of the five mages who survived the events depicted, so that young mages may know the truth.

And that's this book's function: it's designed, partially at least, to deepen and enrich both the players' and the storyteller's understanding and appreciation of *Mage*'s background. And it succeeds admirably. The sections are beautifully illustrated, and carry convincing and individual voices for the characters, taking account of personal, cultural and magical factors with consummate artistry.

A few flaws slightly mar the book – the *Songs of Bernadette* contains some glaringly anachronistic phrases, and the early chapters lack a little pace – but these are minor gripes. This is a book essential to each and every *Mage* group.

Adam Tinworth Score 9/10

Treasure Companion

A supplement for *Rolemaster*

£11.95 ICE 001 800 325 0479 Out now

Controlling the distribution of wealth within a game system can be tricky: without clear boundaries players can accrue unrealistic hordes. When treasure includes magic items, the need for control is even greater.

The problem with *Rolemaster* and its sibling *MERP* is that while the rules cover treasure, they don't do so exhaustively. Referees soon encounters uncovered areas, particularly magic item creation. Hence the need for this *Companion*.

As ever, it's thoroughly researched, providing factual basics about areas such

as alchemy and gemstones so you can ensure you don't blunder when placing treasure. There are detailed sections on the use of wealth, as well as the abuse of it through tactics such as coin shaving.

The main section concerns alchemists, whose profession it is to create magic items. Included are new professions and many new spell lists, even spells for deities so that major items can be created. The time and costs for items are specified, demonstrating how easily a major item could become an alchemist's life work.

With this in mind, not many players will choose alchemy as a profession. The real need is for non-player characters, so a few pre-rolled characters would have been appreciated. There are, however, treasure generation tables and a complete set of unique items with descriptions, which does make creating a scenario easier.

It's a bit much that we need a separate supplement to deal with treasure: better coverage in the standard system would have sufficed. As the game stands, though, this *Companion* should settle a good few arguments. But whether you need this degree of detail will very much depend on your style of game.

David Taylor **Score 7/10**

Chaos Overlords

A strategy game for Windows 95
£39.99 US Gold/New World Computing 0121 625 3366 Out now

Chaos Overlords casts you as a gang boss dedicated to controlling your near-future city. While the overworked and poorly equipped police pose little threat to your operations, you're not the only

aspiring 'godfather' in the city. And the other bosses want your territory.

The game is played from a main screen that shows the city divided into neighbourhoods. Each turn you can hire gangs and move them around to perform your orders. Each gang has several ability ratings, and so one gang may be better suited to performing some actions than others. The more skilled a gang, the more money you have to pay it each turn.

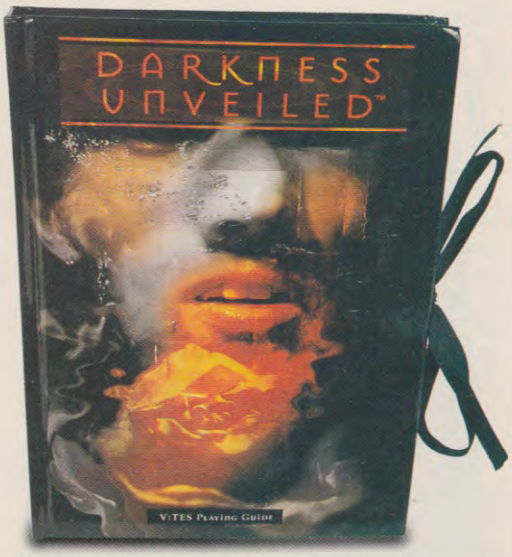
Chaos Overlords is a well →

A player's guide to *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*

Darkness Unveiled

£9.50 Wizards of the Coast 0345 125599 Out now

Long-delayed and eagerly anticipated, has the *V:TES* player's guide been worth the wait?



When something is as well put together as this, you just can't help hoping that the contents match the production values. From the stunning Dave McKean cover art to the black ribbons that tie it closed, this hardback 200-page book is by far the best looking collectable card game player's guide around, and it could show a lot of roleplaying rules writers a thing or two in terms of presentation and feel.

Fortunately, all this visual and tactile splendour hasn't been wasted on poor-quality text. In a market where 'player's guide' often translates into 'rules revision and card list', *Darkness Unveiled* stands out as an example of what a player's guide *should* be.

It begins with a brief forward that details the development of the game, from the early brainchild of White Wolf *Magic: The Gathering* fans to the finished cards. Next comes a scene-setting introduction that manages to convey the intended atmosphere of *V:TES*. The remainder of the book is divided into six chapters. First comes the most recent version of the rules, complete with several examples and clarifications. Chapter two details the basics of deck construction, discussing the various styles of *V:TES* deck and the balance of card types, finishing with notes about some important cards to watch for.

Chapter three takes a closer look at each of the seven Clans available in the game. Each Clan's background and nature is detailed, followed by a description of the vampires belonging to it and an optional 'Storytelling Rule' intended to emphasise their individuality. After that comes a discussion of specific cards important to the Clan, and a look at the Disciplines available to its members. The chapter closes with a look at multi-Clan decks.

The fourth chapter deals with the characters of the players themselves, the Methuselahs, and their motivations. It includes optional rules for character archetypes, each with an advantage and a flaw, and some extremely useful, in-depth advice on storytelling – one of the book's high-points.

Chapter five discusses strategy and tactics during play, looking at each of the important aspects of the game in turn, and explaining how to take advantage of them. Rules variants are detailed in chapter six. Following this is a frequently asked questions list, errata, a card list and a glossary.

Vampire: The Eternal Struggle is one of the more complex CCGs – if any game needed a clear, well written player's guide it was this one. *Darkness Unveiled* is a must for any *V:TES* player. It's packed full of useful advice, intelligent discussion and handy hints. Apart from the lack of an index there's very little wrong with it. It will give novice and expert players alike a clearer understanding of both how to play and how to win.

Andy Butcher

Score 9/10

The War Of The Amazon

An expansion set for *Rage*
10-card Booster Packs £1.40
White Wolf 001 404 292 1819
Out now

Based on White Wolf's *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* roleplaying system, *Rage* has always been a fast-paced, action-packed card game with great 'graphic novel' style art.

Rather than churning out more vicious combat moves and tougher werewolves, though, White Wolf has put a great deal of thought into the expansion sets. Each release has increased both the game's depth and the options open to players without spoiling its simplicity and speed. Fortunately, *The War Of The Amazon* is no exception.

The set introduces two new character races, new victory conditions and a whole new type of card. The Mokolé are a race of were-alligators, while the Balam Bastet are the were-jaguar tribe of the Bastet (were-cats). Both these races, native to the South American rain forests that form the setting for most of *The War Of The Amazon*, feature several characters, along with suitable Gift, Caern and equipment cards.

The new type of card is the Battlefield, which is played into the Hunting Grounds, and fought over. These cards offer more opportunities for scoring victory points, and several optional victory conditions are given to take this into account.

The set builds on previous expansions, and includes cards that require the use of their additional rules. With that proviso, *The War Of The Amazon* is another excellent expansion that offers a great deal for any dedicated player.

Andy Butcher **Score 8/10**

Runes & Ruins

An expansion for *Spellfire*
12-card Booster Packs £1.99 TSR
01223 212517 Out now

Kevin Melka's selection of the 125 cards making up this set seems somewhat confused: many have no bearing on runes or a ruins.

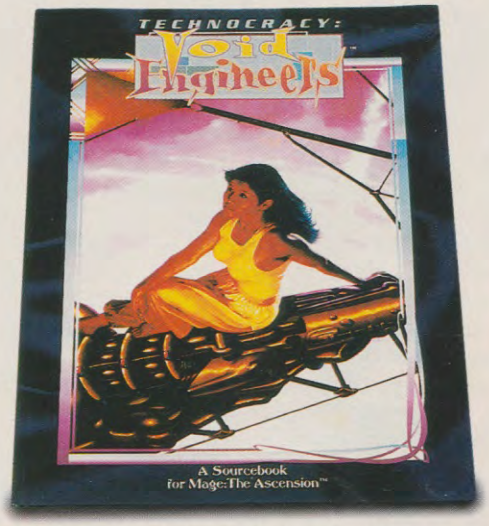
The artwork is once again cut from posters, paintings and product covers, but this time it will be better received by the *AD&D* faithful because it comes from the cult and classic eras of fantasy art. *Runes & Ruins* offers *Spellfire* players more of the same, with giants and →

A sourcebook for *Mage: The Ascension*

Technocracy: Void Engineers

£8.99 White Wolf 001 404 292 1819 Out now

follow the technocracy's explorers to the edge of known reality...



My heart always sinks a little when I come across a supplement published this late into the 90s with what can only be described as gratuitous totty on the cover. Usually this serves only to distract from the paucity of the contents within, and *Technocracy: Void Engineers* is no exception. To add insult to injury, the text makes it plain that any Void Engineer worth her salt would not dress as the cover 'star' does.

So who are these Void Engineers? They are the explorers of the Technocracy, a group of mages attempting to control and define reality through technology, and destroy the supernatural world at the same time. In short, they are Bad Guys. *Void Engineers* is the fourth of a series of books defining the five groups that make up the Technocracy.

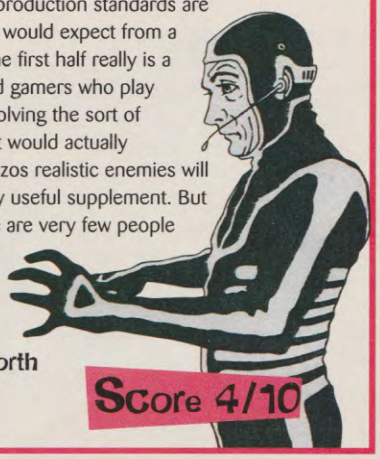
As a supplement, it starts promisingly enough (cover aside). The first half tells the history, goals and structure of the Engineers, as related by one of their members. It's a cracking read, even if the ideas presented are rather obvious extrapolations from the description of the Engineers in the main rulebook.

We then plunge into a chapter of spells (or procedures, as the Technocracy call them) and equipment. The fourth chapter details an Umbral cruiser, one of the Engineers' other-dimensional craft, and its crew.

There are frequent references to other *Mage* supplements throughout the text, quickly eroding any idea that this supplement is meant to stand on its own. Equally unforgivable is the tendency to use jargon long before it is explained, making reading the book a frustrating and often confusing experience. There is a lexicon towards the back of the book, but it's not flagged on the contents page, and who reads the end of a supplement first?

The other major problem is that most *Mage* games aren't going to stray into the sort of weird areas where the Engineers hang out: the deep sea, the Arctic, the far reaches of space and the Umbra. Even if they do, the Engineers, as the sourcebook points out, tend to use troops from other Technocracy groups to fight player character types. Thus, to use most of this book in a game is going to take a Hell of a lot of work if you don't want it all to feel terribly contrived.

Still, the production standards are as high as you would expect from a White Wolf. The first half really is a good read, and gamers who play campaigns involving the sort of weird stuff that would actually make these bozos realistic enemies will find this a fairly useful supplement. But I suspect there are very few people playing that sort of game.



Adam Tinworth

Score 4/10

A collection of adventures for *Shadowrun*

Super Tuesday

£8.99 FASA 001 312 243 5660 Out now

In the sixth world of *Shadowrun*, 2057 is an election year. And that means lots of work for shadowrunners...

With America currently in the sweaty grip of election fever, there's seldom been a better time for FASA to turn its attention to the previously neglected politics of the *Shadowrun* game world.

The United Canadian and American States have been rocked by the revelation that the elections of 2056 – dubbed by the media 'the dullest election of the 21st century' – were rigged. Evidence emerged that the ageing 'remote vote' system had been tampered with, although the culprits remain unknown. A subsequent Congressional hearing impeached the President, and Speaker of the House Betty Jo Pritchard became, by default, the first female President of the UCAS until a new election could be held.

Now the frantic campaigning is underway. With just under eight months before the votes must be cast, every political faction in the country is striving for public attention, and the quick election means that, for the first time in over a century, it won't be won by sheer financial might. At this point Dunkelzahn, the infamous media personality and great western dragon, enters the race.

Super Tuesday serves a dual purpose for *Shadowrun*. It acts as an introduction to the 2057 campaign, detailing the background to the election and the six major candidates, and contains five adventures set against this backdrop. With all the dirty tricks possible during an election, there are many opportunities for shadow types.

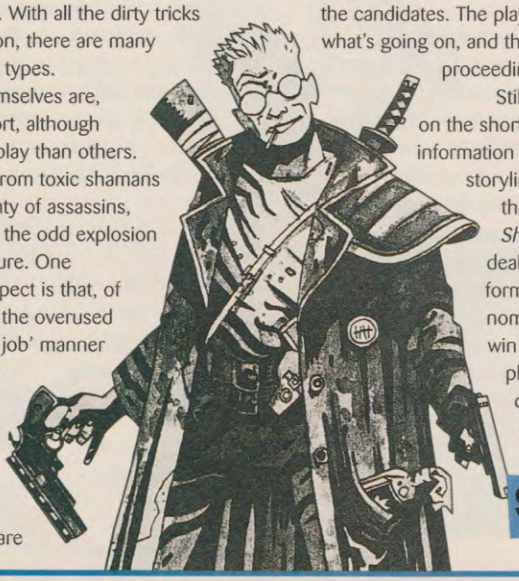
The adventures themselves are, necessarily, relatively short, although some will take longer to play than others. They involve everything from toxic shamans to insect spirits, with plenty of assassins, double crosses and even the odd explosion thrown in for good measure. One particularly impressive aspect is that, of the five, only two start in the overused 'Mr Johnson offers you a job' manner – the other three employ more interesting (and less obvious) techniques to involve the players. Even the two that *do* start with a straightforward job offer are better done than most such scenes.

The only real problem with *Super Tuesday* is that each adventure is concerned, to a greater or lesser extent, with each of the main presidential candidates. Although a clever referee could probably conceal this from the players in some of the stories, and the separate scenarios aren't intended to be played back-to-back, it's still highly unlikely that the same group of runners from Seattle would become involved with all of the candidates. The players will eventually realise what's going on, and this could easily spoil the proceedings.

Still, five good adventures (if a little on the short side) and valuable background information on the 2057 election (the storyline of which is scheduled to run through several forthcoming *Shadowrun* releases) isn't a bad deal. On top of this you get a voting form, which you can use to nominate the candidate you want to win – in this manner, *Shadowrun* players will be the people who decide the outcome of the election. Vote Dunkelzahn!

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10



← elementals brought into the fray, along with champions Bigby, Tenser and Ren.

The most interesting cards of the set are the unarmed combat holds, kicks and punches, presented in a very unusual oil painting form and carrying a clenched fist symbol not yet in the rulebook. The recent revision of the *Spellfire* rules and the inclusion in this booster set of several variations of Magic Items, Artifacts and Allies attest to the fact that the authors are turning the game from being Magic and Event-based back towards its origins of Champion and Ally combat play.

In all, *Runes & Ruins* is a fairly useful expansion set, with several cards that might make altering your deck worthwhile.

Chris Baylis **Score 6/10**

TableMaster

A generic roleplaying accessory for the PC

£25.95 (Windows), £22.95 (DOS), *Table Pack* expansions £7.99 each

FarPoint Technology

0181 581 7743 Out now

There are surprisingly few commercial RPG aids available for the ref with a computer. *TableMaster*, which enables you to construct and use a limitless number of

tables, is intended to fill that gap.

You must learn a very simple language and use it to input your table in the form of a text file. It's not too hard to manage and, once the table is entered, the program will generate random results. 40 ready-made tables are provided, suitable for use with a wide variety of games.

There are three *Table Pack* expansion disks available, two for fantasy settings and the last aimed at sci-fi games. Each has over 30 tables that generate everything from dragons to spaceport bar menus.

TableMaster has its uses, but it doesn't do anything that you can't do yourself with a handful of dice, and entering new tables, while simple, can be time consuming. For a tables-heavy system such as *Rolemaster TableMaster* could be a great help. For simpler systems, though, it is limited to providing inspiration for flagging imaginations, which is where the ready-made tables come in handy.

Andy Butcher **Score 6/10** →

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A supplement for *AD&D*

Den Of Thieves

£9.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

ever since I was a kid, I always wanted to be a gangster...

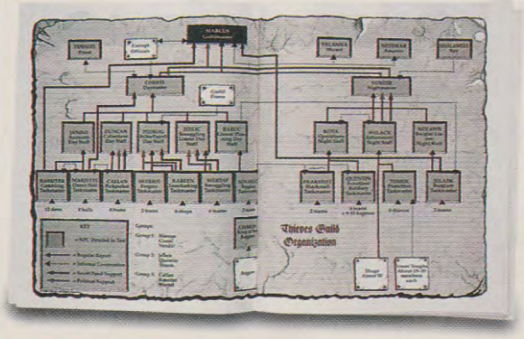
AD&D has a long-standing crime problem. Not in any 'hang 'em high' Tory MP way, but in the fact that thieves' guilds have traditionally only popped up as two-dimensional plot devices that supply rent-a-rogues. *Den Of Thieves* attempts to steal away all the best criminal ideas and stash them in a single work.

Den Of Thieves presents a 'theoretical' model by way of an example guild, describing in detail the major players, their political relationships and personal strengths. These characters aren't staggeringly original creations – each being little more than an exceptional skill backed by a cut-out-and-keep personality – but the guild's complex power structure offers plenty of scope for inter-faction fighting in which players can become embroiled.

Following the familiar Mafia model, the 'example' guild doesn't just rely on burglary and pick pocketing for its income. This den of thieves also counterfeits, forges, extorts, mugs, blackmails, pimps, gambles, loan sharks, smuggles, protects and – as it is coyly termed – supplies 'dancing girls'. Each 'business' has its own 'Capo' who organises the den's crews and ensures that any single thief's greed never jeopardises the overall guild's wealth or health.

Detailed and thorough, *Den Of Thieves* is so eager to legitimise the functional aspects of thieves' guilds that it coughs up tables for everything from Random Smuggling Incidents through to a system for running pursuits through unmapped city streets. Yet it lacks the single most appealing aspect of the gangster myth – glamour!

The quick-hit adventures that come with the supplement and are intended to exhibit what a guild can do fail to convey the necessary style. They work, but a multi-faceted and multi-talented gang of high-class thieves like this should exude the swaggering



arrogance of the Krays or Capone. Attempts are made to add energy with a Zorro-like Owl and super spy Shalamell, but these are shrouded in too much mystery to be useful.

Player's attempting to build their own guild on the *Den Of Thieves* model would find this mob-DIY kit tedious and overly time consuming. There's too much emphasis on the book-keeping, and too little on pulling the 'big-heist' that true thieves must crave, for the suggested system to be fun. The crimes are a little too clean, the political puppetry a little too vague, and the profits a little too low.

The supplement's example thieves' guild does, however, provide a useful off-the-shelf resource for referees to use in city-based gaming sessions. It is a powerful enough organisation that can legitimately emerge from the shadows with sufficient clout to pull even hardened parties in and make them an offer they can't refuse.

Trenton Webb

Score 6/10

Time Gate

An adventure game for the PC

£39.99 Infogrames

0171 738 8199 Out now

From Infogrames, the team that re-invented the computer adventure game with the classic *Alone In The Dark*, comes *Time Gate*. Cast as William Tibbs, a law student in Paris, you find yourself involved in a centuries-old plot that caused the downfall of the Knights Templar. To save

your girlfriend, Juliette, you must travel through time and face the forces of evil.

Time Gate uses a similar game engine to the *Alone In The Dark* games. You view the action from a third-person 3D perspective, with your character and any others displayed as polygonal graphics. The gameplay involves exploring locations to find objects, which are then used to solve puzzles, combined with a dash of hand-to-hand combat, either unarmed or with swords, shields and other weapons.

The game looks good, and the sound is well done and suitably atmospheric. The plot twists and turns, the puzzles are challenging and the combat scenes are satisfying. In short, it's another damn fine adventure game.

But, polished though it is, *Time Gate* doesn't really offer anything new. If you're familiar with the *Alone In The Dark* series you won't be able to escape the feeling that you've seen all this before. Still, there's precious little to criticise, and it offers several hours of solid gaming.

Andy Butcher **Score 7/10**

Firewalkers

Dragon Dice Kicker Pack 2

£4.99 for eight dice TSR

01223 212517 Out now

Your new *Dragon Dice* Shield is already out of date now that the latest addition to TSR's collectable dice game has hit the shelves. *Firewalkers* come in the regular Monster and three, two and one-point dice, are a Red-Blue colour combination, and carry distinctive Oriental identification faces as well as another bunch of completely different icons for melee, movement, missile and magic.

Firewalker monsters Genie, Fireshadow, Gorgon, Phoenix and

Salamander are very powerful, as are many of the new spells, which include Firebolt, Flashfire and Elemental Blast under the Red-Spell banner, with Dust Devil, Elemental Blast and Mirage joining the Blue-Spell listing. Mirage is an essential spell against weeny decks (armies with lots of one-point dice) since it causes all one-point dice to save or die, and the Genie is the best offensive monster available, with the possible exception of the Beholder.

Firewalkers receive their special ability bonuses for being in either Coastland or Flatland, and can move from one army to another without passing through (or spending a turn in) the reserves. They are also much better balanced, in terms of dice variation as well as distribution, than the *Amazons*, particularly for a single-colour army. They are designed as battle dice, especially when mixed with a group of *Amazons*.

If TSR can continue to produce expansions of this quality that provide interesting and useful additions to the game, *Dragon Dice* is going to be around for a long time indeed.

Chris Baylis **Score 8/10**

The Best of the Star Wars Adventure Journal

A supplement for the *Star Wars* RPG

£13.95 West End Games

001 717 253 6990 Out now

The *Star Wars Journal* isn't entirely, or even primarily, about roleplaying. It's subject matter is the *Star Wars* universe – that sprawling, baroque version of it which has grown up around the novels of Timothy Zahn and other authors.

About half of this book is given over to short fiction. Although readable enough – and supplemented with character sheets and other RPG data – these stories are of fairly limited use to a referee. They are aimed much more at those of you who know who Tallon Karrde and Mara Jade are, and care about how they first met.

There is also a fairly interesting historical background article that tries to fill the five-year gap between *Return of the Jedi* and *Heir* as a possible campaign setting.

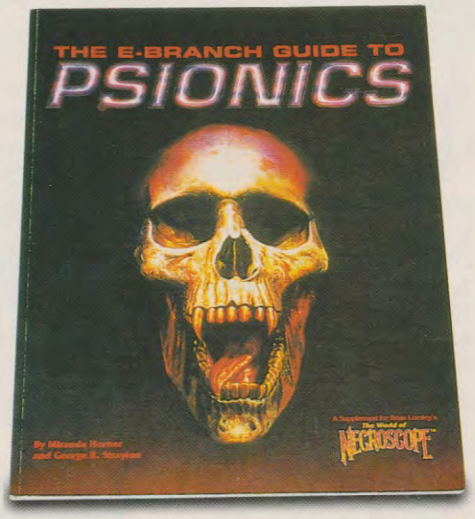
Of more direct use to roleplayers is a free-trader's guide to Servacos, a harsh planet ruled by clannish lords and dedicated to the production of spice. (The author freely admits that it is 'Kessel' by another name.) There's a rather contrived scenario in which players have to take →

A supplement for *Necroscope*

The E-Branch Guide To Psionics

£11.95 West End Games 001 717 253 6990 Out now

The powers of the mind are many and varied, but how many does a game really need?



The *E-Branch Guide To Psionics* is the first supplement for West End's *Necroscope* game. In the world of Brian Lumley's *Necroscope*, E-Branch is a top-secret organisation under the control of the British government that specialises in 'ESPionage' – intelligence operations involving psychic powers.

The *Guide* is something of a mish-mash, being split into three distinct (and largely unrelated) parts. The first and largest, *ESP Skills*, is the 'guide' itself. It introduces over two dozen new psychic powers, the majority being drawn directly from Lumley's works.

Each power is dealt with in a similar manner to those in the main rulebook, beginning with a description of the power and its limitations, going on to discuss its use in game terms, and finishing with an example of the power, complete with all the relevant rules information and costs. Due to the highly flexible nature of the *MasterBook* system used in *Necroscope*, some of the descriptions are quite lengthy, and the frequent examples and suggestions come in handy.

The next section, *ESPer Equipment*, takes a very brief look at a number of items that focus or enhance ESP talents. It's fairly obvious stuff – candles, crystal balls, herbs, maps, Tarot cards and so on. Each 'class' of item is described in general terms, along with some specific notes about its game use.

Finally, there's a relatively detailed adventure, *Channel Secrets*, that is designed to launch a new *Necroscope* campaign with the players as members of E-Branch. Unfortunately, while not without some good points and clever ideas, this is probably the worst part of the book. Unless the players are very clever and resourceful they're likely to be killed within the first session, which is hardly a good way to start a campaign, especially if novice players are involved. An experienced team might find *Channel Secrets* a pleasant, if slightly linear, challenge. For anyone else it's only real use is as a source of potential ideas and characters – turning it into a playable scenario will take a fair amount of work.

The *E-Branch Guide To Psionics* is a curious beast, then. On the good side, the new powers are clearly explained and exhaustively detailed. But the adventure is nothing to get excited about, and the discussion of equipment is very brief. Also, just how important is a new list of powers? The original *Necroscope* book covered most of the well-known ESP abilities, and the majority on offer here are obscure. Fans of Lumley will be interested to see how the powers, which help maintain *Necroscope*'s unique feel, have been implemented in the game. But even then it's hardly required reading for more casual players.

Andy Butcher

Score 5/10

A player's guide for *Middle-earth: The Wizards*

Middle-earth: The Wizards Companion

£6.95 ICE 001 800 325 0479 Out now

Rallying the free peoples against the Dark Lord isn't easy —do ICE have the answers?

Considering the reputation ICE has developed for producing exhaustively detailed roleplaying games and supplements, it was perhaps not surprising that the company's entry into the collectable card game market followed the same trend. A highly complex, multi-faceted game with a strong strategic bias, *Middle-earth: The Wizards* has been crying out for a strategy guide since its released.

The *Middle-earth: The Wizards Companion* is an attempt to satisfy this need. After a short introduction, which includes a discussion of the background to the game and the sources used for inspiration, the book launches headlong into a revised and annotated version of the rules. With the extra space allowed by the large format (American A4) book, the rules are explained in plenty of detail, and are accompanied by frequent examples, notes and definitions.

Next comes a section that deals with teaching the game to new players. This includes an example deck that covers all the major elements of the game in a basic fashion, some tournament guidelines, and a look at some basic strategies.

The *Companion* then turns to a new aspect of the game, Scenarios. These allow you to play the game with modified objectives, aiming to complete a specific quest or adventure instead of the more general goals of the standard game. Ten Scenarios are described, covering a variety of different playing styles, including some solo games.

The obligatory card lists, organised into comprehensive indices by card type, make up the penultimate section, and the book ends with several appendices. As well as symbol keys, an index and a player turn summary, there are no less than six full-colour maps, each dealing with a different aspect of the game in graphical form: Regions and types, Sites and playable Resources, Character Home Sites, Site-specific Resources, Region-specific Hazards, and Site-specific Hazards.

For any player of *Middle-earth: The Wizards*, the revised rules and maps alone make this something of a required purchase. The updated rules deal with pretty much any question or difficulty that might crop up, and the maps are incredibly handy, both during play and when building decks.

Unfortunately, you can't help thinking that these should have been included in the original game – it grates a bit to have to spend extra money for them. In addition, the rest of the book just doesn't go far enough. Although the idea of Scenarios is a clever one that highlights the flexibility of the system ICE has created, the 15 pages dedicated to them would have been much better used to expand the discussion of strategies and tactics, which only gets a single page.

Even the maps, while very handy, don't go far enough. With a little extra thought, ICE could have done away with the unwieldy Region card system altogether, effectively giving players a board to use for their games. What is here is good stuff – but it could have been a lot better.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

← part in a yacht race in order to get to a sunken spaceship, and a very nice, albeit rather brief, overview of running campaigns involving privateer crews.

If you like the writing of Zahn and Tyers, then this book is probably worth having for the fiction; but if it's roleplaying material you are after, there are better things to spend your credits on.

Andrew Rilstone **Score 4/10**

Chronicle of the Black Labyrinth

A Supplement for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*

£6.99 White Wolf

001 404 292 1819 Out now

This supplement, subtitled 'A Forbidden Tome of Wyrmish Lore', is presented as an authentic reprint of arcana, complete with compiler's notes. The editor condemns it as 'arcane and esoteric pornography' – sounds promising – while the original compiler insists it is a 'practical manual… for all who would serve the Wyrm'. The subject matter is not the Black Spiral Dancers, but the Black Spiral or Labyrinth itself, which is both a prison for the Wyrm and a journey of self-knowledge.

Over half the book is taken up with glimpses of the Wyrm's influence through the spread of Pictish blood. This is far too derivative of *Call of Cthulhu*, with familiar stories of nasties lurking under the earth and young girls giving birth to unnatural things. It is brightened up by a strong dose of black humour, with most chapters written as generic parodies, and the revelation that the Blackadders were (inept) agents of the Wyrm!

The latter chapters are far more useful for gaming purposes. One outlines the rites of passage through the nine layers of the Labyrinth to face the Wyrm itself, and another is an evocative and blood-drenched demonstration of one such rite.

There is no advice on translating this information into game terms, and referees won't get much out of it without lots of work and a copy of *The Book of the Wyrm*. However, the *Chronicles* are useful for insights into the beliefs and goals of the Wyrm's human servants. The bad guys are always more colourful and engaging if they have a reason for their beastliness. It also gives plenty of gory flavour to the rites that the PCs will inevitably gatecrash. Recommended for hardcore *Werewolf* campaigns only.

Mark Barter **Score 5/10**

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*The intrepid **Karen Newis** hunts out all that*

Barbarian King

The Barbarian King (3106, around 65mm high when assembled) set is lovely. Two loyal barbarians strain to hold their king aloft on his shield. Well-sculpted, each figure is a delight. The pieces kind of fit where they are supposed to, making assembly a breeze, and an almost entire absence of flash further enhances the experience. Of course, you don't have to assemble it: you could just use the figures on their own.

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Council of the Wyrm Bronze Dragon

I loathe this piece (11-578, around 70mm high). The anatomy, posing and accoutrements are dreadful. The body is halfway between chunky and sinuous, the neck is too long, the arms are far too long, and the 'hands' have studs instead of talons. The tail is ludicrous. The head is alright. None of the joints fit, but at least the flash isn't too bad. Don't waste your money, folks.

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Unicorn & Yearling

These two unicorns by RAFM (3311, adult 45mm long) are extremely pretty and convincingly ethereal. They're delicate to the point of fragility, so great care should be taken with cleaning in preparation for painting. The mould maker has used some intelligence, resulting in minimal mould lines, and these follow the contours of the sculpture. Very, very nicely done and not a little cute. These are indeed desirable.

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Grim Reaper

This Grim Reaper (02020, around 67mm long) certainly is grim. The unbelievable facial detail is only topped by the hooves of his mount, which are akin to hockey pucks. It looks as though he bought his victims' heads at the local joke store. The flash is also terrible – it's not worth paying money for this, even though it's relatively cheap.

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Nicole

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Nicole

Nicole (02036, around 32mm high) is a delight. A female fighter clad in semi-plate and chain-mail armour, she is feminine, properly protected for battle, and appealingly sculpted. She needs a clean-up for painting, but it is worth the effort. Good decorative detail on her scabbard and shield make the painting both easier and more interesting.

Reaper Miniatures (Texas, USA)

001 214 434 3088 **around £1.95**

Blood Beret Sergeant 2 (for Mutant Chronicles)

Armed to the teeth and sporting a fine beret, this heavily armoured chap (9831, around 35mm high) is designed for *Mutant Chronicles* but will fit into any sci-fi game. The static-looking pose of his limbs belies his tortured facial expression, but sergeants are supposed to shout, not do things, right? The flash is significant but not chronic, and sufficiently badly placed to demand cleaning.

Heartbreaker (Philadelphia, USA)

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Beastmen

People talk of jelly-mould cars: I bring you jelly-mould figures. It's not clear whether these Beastmen (7301, around 32mm high) are bull-men or sheep-men. Either way, the definition of the musculature is soft to say the least, and the facial detail is also decidedly fuzzy. Once you've cleaned off the parting lines, careful painting may bring about a more believable look. Disappointing really, but they could be worse.

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Elven Bowmen

While not stunningly original, these are at least truly new figures from Games Workshop. The bowmen (around 32mm high) are well cast, tidily sculpted and not overly exaggerated. The poses are very similar, individuality being endowed by means of differing clothes and hairstyles. Manageable flash in relatively sensible places means cleaning is not too irksome. They should be fairly easy to paint, and represent reasonably good value for money.

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The Great Library

Summer is a time of travel, adventure and starships... We eye what's recently been written on the subject.

The Black Dragon

by Chris Claremont and John Bolton

Published by Titan Graphic novel £10.99

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John Bolton always wanted the artwork for *The Black Dragon* to be reproduced in the original black-and-white. When Marvel ran the series ten years ago, this request wasn't heeded. Now it has been – and the storytelling is more effective for it.

This is a mediaeval fantasy of magick and encroaching evil set in a realistic and apparently authentic England shortly after the Norman Conquest. Many would happily share the island with the conquerors, but others resent their presence and surly ways. There is insurgency in the West, and the rebel De Valère (hero James Dunreith's childhood friend) has foolishly enlisted the pitspawn to expel those who have plundered and occupied his land. De Valère believes his motives to be just, but cannot control the evil he has unleashed, and soon it controls his adversary Dunreith too.

"I am that which thou hast e'er known but ne'er understood, sensed but ne'er touched, sought but ne'er found. I am thy self. Try as thou might, do what thou wilt... I shall not be denied"

Higher spiritual motives collide with base desire. Shocking demons are drawn in straight lines and exquisite faeries wear spider's web wings and gowns of silk and dew. The storyline and much of the illustration are often confusing, but this is intentional and inevitable in a story where realism freely mingles with fantastical illusion and the blatantly impossible.

Ignore the corny appearance of Robin Hood and his band of merry men and let Claremont's voluminous text and Bolton's inspirational yet superbly controlled artwork transport you back to the time of legend.

Jonathan Palmer

Score 8/10

Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Vehicles and Vessels

by Bill Smith Published by Boxtree

Large Format Paperback £14.99 Out now

Most of us could recognise an X-Wing if we saw one, or a TIE Fighter, or the Millennium Falcon, but who of us could boast to know where the fire-linked laser cannons are to be found on an Incom Y-4 transport?

The latest in Boxtree's series of *Essential Guides* to all elements of the *Star Wars* universe sets us right over such trivia; detailing 100 vehicles and star-going craft to be seen and read about in the movies, the graphic novels and the numerous spin-off books that have appeared in the 19 years since *Star Wars* was first released.

"Snowspeeders are heavily modified Incom T-47 air-speeders."

Players of the *Star Wars* RPG are going to find this book useful (if not a riveting read), mainly because each craft description is embellished with a wealth of historical notes. The drawings (there is a full-page illustration for each vehicle) should also prove of worth to players of the game, though they lack scale or dimension details, which is highly annoying. However, the casual *Star Wars* fan, and even die-hard enthusiasts will find little to further their knowledge of the *Star Wars* universe in this tome. Detailed it may be, but ultimately, it's stale and rather boring.

Paul Pettengale Score 4/10

From Prussia With Love

by John de Chancie Published by Prima Publishing Paperback

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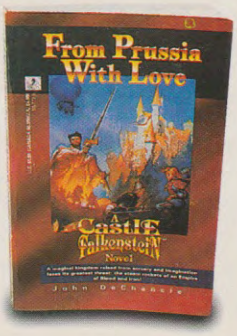

This is a light and often funny novel that accompanies the *Castle Falkenstein* game. A brisk and epic tale, it makes clever use of stock characters and nods to other genres to give, if nothing else, an idea of how fun and versatile Steampunk can be.

"Jove's ballocks, the bloody thing's headed this way!"

The world of *Falkenstein* not only possesses all the regular trappings of a steam-age alternative reality (warring states, ironclads, airships and the like) but it also has magic, monsters, dwarves, dragons and faeries. In

another universe, even one similar to our own, anything is possible.

The book does not dwell, though, on the boundlessness of the multiverse, but on the troubles of Castle Falkenstein, which is threatened by Prussia's development of steam-powered intercontinental ballistic missiles. None of this is to be taken too seriously – the book generally pokes fun at its characters, with the story taking the form of a general send-up of the action-adventure format – there's even a tip of the hat made to James Bond. Those looking for deeper, darker inspiration for Steampunk sessions should look elsewhere.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 5/10

The A to Z of Babylon 5

by David Bassom Published by Boxtree
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With *Babylon 5* – arguably the most intelligent SF show of recent years – back on our screens at last, interest in the series is growing. Enter *The A to Z of Babylon 5*, a complete alphabetical guide to the show's first two series and the beginning of the third. It's ideal both for newcomers to the show and for referees developing scenarios for a *GURPS*-based *Babylon 5*-themed affair of their own, or for the official *Babylon 5* game. (See news pages in **arcane** 6 for details of this.)

This said, the *A to Z* has two problems: first, it's largely bereft of pictures, meaning we're constantly being told about the Drazi, EarthDome and Talia Winters, but rarely shown who they are. There is, to its credit, an eight-page colour section, but extra black-and-white illustrations mixed with the body text would have been nice.

"Sheridan likes fresh fruit, particularly oranges, grapes, nectarines and black plums."

The other, bigger problem is that – unlike most other SF TV shows – *Babylon 5*'s proposed five-year run tells one long, drawn-out story, and we're currently only halfway through. Thus, with each passing week, more and more of the information contained here will be rendered out of date or incomplete. So this is a useful reference tool, but those who've been watching the show closely – or who have access to the Internet and the excellent and constantly updated *Lurkers's Guide to Babylon 5* to be found at `http://www.hyperion.com/lurk/toc.html` – will find little they haven't already heard.

Matt Bielby Score 6/10

Memory Seed

by Stephen Palmer Published by Orbit
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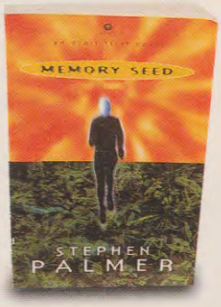


This is the second book I've read this year about plants taking over the world. Jeff Noon's excellent *Pollen* was the first, and this was firmly planted in my mind (sorry) when I breached the pages of Palmer's first attempt at novelistic success.

"She poked her head out. A mass of bodies lay all around, fifteen at least, some twitching."

And that was a pity, for although *Memory Seed* is a strong novel, it doesn't possess the sparkling originality nor the surrealistic dream-like quality that blesses Noon's tale of floral superiority. *Memory Seed* reads like a fairy tale and, as such, you can never really take it all that seriously. This, I feel, was not the author's intent.

Somewhere between science fiction and fantasy (you are never sure, at first, whether you're reading about the future of our world or a made-up fantasy land), this is the story of a seemingly young girl's efforts to discover the ultimate truths about the world she lives in. The plot twists occasionally, but its linearity is ultimately obvious, as is the writing style used to weave the storyline. A pleasant read, if not a gripping one.

Paul Pettengale Score 6/10

The Return

by William Shatner Published by Pocket
Hardback £9.99 Out now

Space may be the final frontier, but William Shatner certainly has a lot of front himself. This novel, he hoped, would resurrect his career – a career that crashed with the *Enterprise* in the last film. Surely movie bosses couldn't spurn the offer of one last outing with Captain Kirk at the helm, back from the dead?

It was, however, an offer they felt they *could* refuse, so this is one novel that will never be screened – which is a pity in some ways, but most assuredly a blessing in others. The plot, in which Kirk is brought back to life by the Borg and the Romulans in a conspiracy to use him to defeat the Federation, is a contrived and absurd farce which is altogether melodramatic and completely over the top. What more could you want from *Star Trek*?

"Actually, Mr Data, logic had little to do with my identification of the device. I have seen it before"

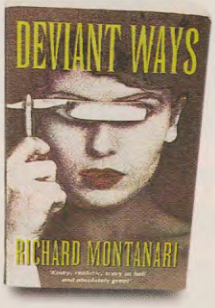
The Return's major fault, though, is its total lack of originality. There is enough pace and action, enough in-jokes, enough of wide-eyed Kirk whispering 'Spock!' fiercely (yes, all the old favourites are wheeled on – literally, in one case), and quite enough of Kirk rolling around as if he was 30, but not one new idea, character or race is introduced. This is probably why the ridiculous project was kicked into touch, but I for one would still probably have gone along to the cinema to see them all going cheerfully where every *Star Trek* has always gone before.

Gideon Kibblewhite

Score 5/10

Deviant Ways

by Richard Montanari Published by Signet
Paperback £4.99 Out now



Even if you enjoy reading books in which young women are brutally murdered while having sex and then have bits of their tattooed skin removed in some bizarre serial-killer ritual, you'll be disappointed by *Deviant Ways*, because, try as it might to be thoroughly distasteful, it only succeeds in being completely dull.

Montanari employs a snapshot narrative technique in which you see 'veteran detective' Jack

Paris and his seedy cronies having sex, drinking beer, killing people and living out a whole host of unpleasant roles and fantasies. Every now and again the scenarios and characters collide with a remarkable lack of subtlety, leading to obvious conclusions.

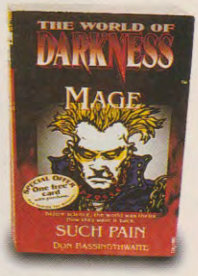
"She was a little more ambitious than Paris had thought, but it was sexy-ambitious."

One telling point: at quite an early stage, Paris discovers one of the serial killers is called Saila. An unusual name, I trust you'll agree. It spells 'alias' backwards.

The World Of Darkness

Mage: Such Pain

by Don Bassingthwaite Published by Boxtree
Paperback £5.99 Out now



White Wolf have always seemed to take an almost perverse pride in producing unusual games. Now the trend continues with their first forays into game-based fiction. What makes both *Mage: Such Pain* and *Vampire: Netherworld* stand out from the majority of such books is that they're both rather good. In addition, they both take unexpected looks at the World Of Darkness.

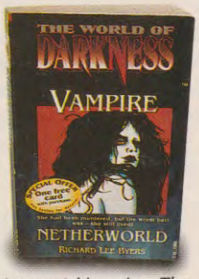
Mage: Such Pain concerns the efforts of Aaron Barry, international playboy (and secret member of the Cult Of Ecstasy), to deal with his father's death and his return to the house of his childhood. Along the way he gets caught up in some very bizarre proceedings, and comes face to face with the Technocracy. It's good, well-written stuff, providing a useful insight into both the Technocracy and the Traditions.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

Vampire: Netherworld

by Richard Lee Byers Published by Boxtree
Paperback £5.99 Out now



Slightly the better of the two, *Vampire: Netherworld* also revolves around a unique threat to both Kine and Kindred. The main character this time, though, isn't even a vampire. Zane is an ordinary human who finds himself caught up in events beyond his understanding, and only the whim of an ancient vampire, Sartak, saves him from death.

It's Sartak that gives the book much of its pace, and seeing the world through the eyes of a vampire far older and more powerful than is familiar to most *Vampire: The Masquerade* players makes for an interesting view on vampire society.

Regardless of which World Of Darkness games you actually play, either of these two books makes for an enjoyable read and offers some insight into areas of the game world that you may not have considered.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

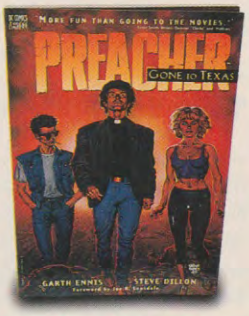
"He rather enjoyed wild weather. As he recalled, he'd liked it even when he was breathing, and thus was susceptible to chills."

Admittedly there are a few points where Montanari injects a degree of tension and where his prose style works to dramatic effect. But the lasting impression this book leaves is of some fairly gruesome detail added to a very average detective/fantasy yarn. The cover boasts that *Deviant Ways* is 'kinky, realistic, scary as hell and absolutely great'. It's not.

Richard Jones Score 4/10

Preacher: Gone to Texas

by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon
Published by Vertigo/DC Graphic novel £9.99 Out now



Since the recent demise of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, the world of comics has been looking for a new hero – and here it is. *Preacher* is one of the most graphic graphic novels I've ever read, pushing back the boundaries of taste even further than *Hellblazer*. People are skinned alive, sodomize themselves with their own severed penises and blow their faces off with shotguns in memory of Kurt Cobain. It took me some time to find a meaningful quote from the book that wasn't littered with abusive language.

"Start telling people God's not there and you'll get the same blank stares you got when you said he was."

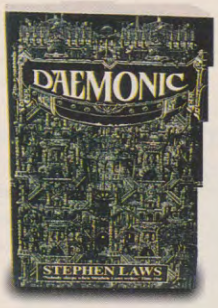
In the case of *Preacher* though, this violence is fully justifiable. The story of what happens when an angel and a demon screw each other and conceive a being as powerful as God, *Preacher* is primarily concerned with the search for meaning that is a preoccupation of the late 20th century.

The book has a surprising range of influences too. From Stephen King to Clint Eastwood, every cult genre of the modern era is ruthlessly plundered by Ennis (the writer) and Dillon (the artist) to weave a non-stop road-trip of a novel that is as repulsive and scary as it is remorselessly fascinating. This is the kind of story that can only be told in this format, and it's a masterpiece of the genre. They don't come much better than this.

Steve Faragher Score 9/10

Deamonic

by Stephen Laws Published by New English Library
Paperback £5.99 Out now



You know the story. Jack Draegerman, immensely successful business tycoon and erstwhile producer of now-in-vogue *gothique-noir* horror movies, offers big money to a disparate bunch of ordinary folk to visit him in his recluse mansion. Once they are there, he announces that, although they didn't know it, they are all his offspring from a variety of bigamous liaisons and, as

"And the further you travel, the deeper into Hell you're going."

such, must now all die at the hands of his beserker daemons – all in the numerous manners described in his films. This is so he can fulfil his side of a deal with the Devil and be granted eternal life. There's to be no escape, no reprieve, no mercy. And we're only a fifth of the way through.

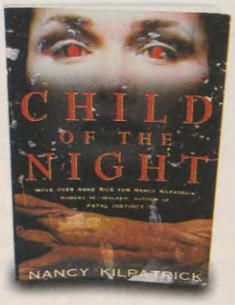
To cut a tedious and hackneyed story short, his mansion eventually blows itself to pieces, destroyed by its own evil. Well I never. Stephen King-style

attempts at characterisation and tension-building do not make up for a stale storyline saturated with Satanic nonsense. In its defence, the book is set up as a deliberate pastiche of the horror movies so influential on the author, but in that regard it's too introverted, and who wants to read a pastiche of gothic horror anyway? *Daemonic* is the name of the book you should avoid. *Diabolical* might have been more apt.

Jonathan Palmer **Score 3/10**

Child of the Night

by Nancy Kilpatrick Published by Raven
Paperback £5.99 Out 20th May 1996



The quotation on the cover reads: 'Move over Anne Rice for Nancy Kilpatrick'. There has been an avalanche of vampire-inspired novels since the success of Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire*. Vampires have evolved from blood-sucking monsters with fixed stares into romanticised, erotic immortals. Undeniably attractive and sophisticated, vampires nowadays are tortured souls. Kilpatrick's vampire conforms.

Carol Robins is an American divorcee seeking escape in Europe from a marriage that ended in betrayal and which could later threaten her life – not the best time to meet an unbalanced, sexually sadistic vampire with a bigger passion for domination than for blood. Nancy Kilpatrick's exploration of the relationship between Carol and the vampire André is disturbingly violent and sexually explicit.

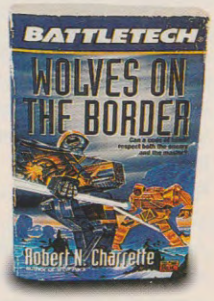
"You're such a stupid bitch. I'm surprised that you haven't provoked someone enough to murder you by now."

So, not one I'd recommend to the feminists among you. Best described as an erotic Mills & Boon 'girl meets S&M monster', writhing with emotional and colourful passages. Largely a fun read, though more than a tad morally questionable in places. Intriguing, but not comparable to Anne Rice at her best.

Maryanne Booth **Score 6/10**

BattleTech: Wolves On The Border

by Robert N Charrette Published by ROC
Paperback £3.50 Out now



After Michael A Stackpole's epic *Malicious Intent* (see **arcane** 6) comes another *BattleTech* novel of impressive scope. This time the author is Robert N Charrette and the period covered is the 3020s.

The book revolves around Minobu Tetsuhara, a Mechwarrior and Samurai of the Draconis Combine, and the infamous mercenary unit Wolf's Dragoons.

"He must never forget that reality was the cruellest of masters."

Wolves On The Border compares very favourably to Charrette's *Shadowrun* novels, effectively capturing the atmosphere of the *Battletech* universe. As with *Malicious Intent* the essence of the book revolves around the politics of the Combine. It deals closely with the effect that these decisions and plans have on the individuals involved. Good stuff.

Andy Butcher **Score 7/10**

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arcane scribblings

Yet more letters have arrived this month for the newbie editor to plough through. And not surprisingly, last issue's religious feature hit a chord...

Dear arcane,

I loved the article on Berserk Christians in the last issue. I lived in the US for a couple of years, during the period when there was a 'little trouble' in New Mexico. I frequently had discussions with people from the

> "perhaps we should picket their churches"

less intelligent States who would picket a games shop which stocked *AD&D* in the hope of getting the shop to drop the line. Perhaps we gamers should picket their churches in protest of the vast amount of misery that religion has caused over the years? The only other solution may be to write a game where the players are fundamentalist Christians crusading against the minions of Satan (i.e. the roleplayers). Surely they couldn't complain about that!

On a slightly more serious note, in my experience, the first thought any gamer has when Satan pops up demanding their soul, is to ask the referee how many Experience Points it's worth.

Scott Chapman, Biggin Hill

Hmm, we knew that the religion and roleplaying feature in arcane *6 was going to stir-up some debate. To address your points, Scott: I don't think picketing churches would be a hugely clever idea. I mean, it would involve getting up early on a Sunday. And if Satan were to exist, and were to appear before any of my roleplaying group, I think Experience Points would be the last thing on their minds!*

Dear arcane,

Some comments on Andrew Rilstone's column in **arcane** 6...

Does 'Roleplaying contain nothing to offend Christians'? As pointed out in the column, there are a few games which 'mess' with Christian mythology. It is however, not clear that Christians *should* take offence to what is, after all, a work of fiction. And it is certainly not clear that problems with a few games should extend to the rest of the hobby. It also seems to raise a bit of a double standard. Messing with other mythologies is seen, by at least some Christians, as 'promotion' – so shouldn't they be glad to see games which give similar treatment to their own religion?

Next, 'There is no occult content in RPGs' – here the reply is more worthy of the description 'bollocks', than the original claim. *Runequest* and *Pendragon* are attacked through guilt by association. Should we really believe that the *current* religious beliefs of the author forced him to include genuine occult material in a game written nearly 20 years ago? Even if it turns out that the person concerned (Greg Stafford) is not the author at all? *Everway*, by simply catering to 'New Age' sensibilities, rather than beliefs, is equally condemned. Sorry, but the only 'real' occult content is the association with the elements – and a few hundred years ago that was perfectly acceptable to Christianity.

I don't know what a 'devout' atheist is, and I don't have any children, but I did consider the little thought experiment. It occurred to me that I do indeed play and enjoy games which feature gods – and a fundamentalist game would not in itself automatically be any different in that respect. But I would need to

> "I play and enjoy games which feature gods"

evaluate the game myself. I also wonder if the fundamentalists would tolerate anything like the number of RPGs that I would ?

Paul K, e-mail

And on the subject of religion and roleplaying, here's a few words from a man who's been at the sharp-end of this debate before...

Dear arcane,

Your 'Dicing with the Devil' feature was fascinating reading, if only because I hadn't realised that some of this stuff was *still* out there. I first saw the Jack Chick comic strip at least 12 years ago when I was working for TSR. Apart from anything else, did this man never realise that comics corrupt *everyone* – as was proved by the fine (ahem) research of Dr Fredric Wertham in the 1950s?

When this issue first came up, TSR responded by doing some of its own research into the '*D&D* deaths' which found that – among others – policemen killed on duty had been included in the statistics because they played *D&D* as a hobby. This, I think, gives some idea of the quality if factual argument that the 'anti' lobby mustered at the time, and presumably still uses to this day. Unfortunately, rational arguments don't work. If someone chooses to believe that a suicide occurred because of *D&D*, they are probably denying that it had anything to do with the reality of the dead person's life. It's easier to blame something 'strange' than to live with the fact that a person felt so desperate that they were willing to die rather than face the problems of another day. All suicides have more than one victim, and we should feel for those left behind who may be worried – or even guilty – about whether they could have done more to help.

Lashing out at a game as the root cause of death is probably a form of denial, and that's glib psychobabble in itself!

The beneficial side of RPGs never gets similar coverage. One of the nice bits about working for TSR and, later, editing *White Dwarf*, were the number of letters that I got from parents saying how glad they were that their children were into *D&D* and the like. Because the rules were

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked '***arcane** *scribblings' and addressed to* **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. *The slightly more technically advanced can send us a* fax on (01225) 465982, *while all you fully fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:*

arcane@futurenet.co.uk *or visit our web site on:*

http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html.

We look forward to hearing from you.

You did what?

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

You asked for tales of RPG sessions resulting in misunderstandings. Well, here's my story...

A few years back I was involved in a *Call of Cthulhu* campaign, and a new guy had just joined. The team was observing a dark ritual of some kind, and the referee had gone to the effort of using props to help us visualise the scene – you know, black candles, skulls, chalk pentagrams... Our RPG HQ was the back-room in a Scout hut, an arrangement we had come to with the Scout leader. Unbeknown to us, that night the Scouts had swapped with the local Church choir. At the very moment we were listening to the ref' scream typical Cthulhu-like nonsense, the choir walked in and started shouting all manner of Godly abuse at us. Took some explaining, I can tell you.

James Parkin

You can't tell us you weren't surprised, you were asking for trouble, weren't you? Still have a T-shirt for your story, and wear it with pride.

complex, mastering English and Maths had become a high priority!

Mike Brunton, e-mail

It's obvious that this the religion issue is one that has plagued the hobby for many years, and I can't see it going away. You're right about the benefits of roleplaying being played down, but it's usually the case that the people who shout loudest are those with a grievance, not those who are content.

Dear arcane,

Would it be possible to have more scenarios in **arcane** in the future? Although I don't agree with some of the comments which have been posted to your forum (regarding the inclusion of system-specific scenarios), it would be great to see more genre-specific offerings, with fully fleshed-out plots. Most of the scenario content thus far in **arcane** has been of no use to me at all – all you've been publishing so far is vague suggestions for plot lines, with nothing concrete. This to me doesn't constitute a 'scenario'.

As far as your features are concerned, I think you're doing okay there, though it would be good to see some new game mechanics from time to time. What's the chance of that, then, eh?

Luke Smith, Bristol

I agree with you Luke, I think that **arcane** *should be publishing genre (though not system) specific scenarios, and that's exactly what we're going to be doing over the coming months. Next month we're bringing you a space station for your science-fiction games, and the month after that we'll be making sure that Cyberpunk-style game players have got something to get their teeth stuck into. But as far as game-mechanics-based features are concerned... Well, I'd shy away from those – with so many games on the market, we'd be stupid to think that we could cover them all sufficiently, and I wouldn't want to get caught into the trap of publishing features which are going to be of interest to a tiny part of* **arcane**'s *readership.*

Dear arcane,

As a dedicated *Star Trek* fan, I feel compelled to ask if you know of any really good *Star Trek* RPGs that are available? And if so, where can I get them from? Oh, and is there any chance of getting hold of that elusive first issue of **arcane**, or is it absolutely and definitely sold-out?

A Swedish Trekkie

Absolutely and definitely! There's no way you can get hold of **arcane** *1 short of coming to the* arcane *office and stealing mine. And I wouldn't advise that (we've got a big alarm thing). And a* **Star Trek** *RPG? Good news/bad news time: there's a game called the* **Star Trek RPG**, *and it's rather excellent. However, the publisher, FASA, fased it out several years ago. So, search through the* →

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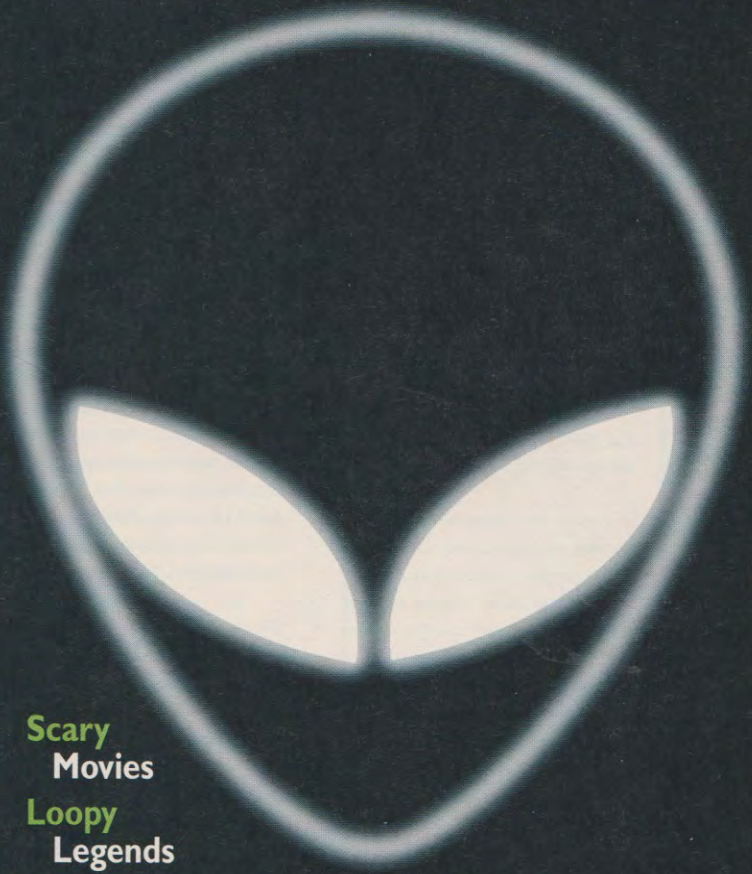

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letters

arcane shorts

Snippets from all those letters which missed making it into the main columns...

I live in America and it costs me dollars, not pounds. I want to buy a subscription, but I can't work out how many dollars £57.75 is. Can you tell me?

Thriving in Michigan

You also say in your letter that you're a maths major. Oh dear... Anyhow, about $85 would be about right.

Well horray! **arcane** has finally developed a sense of humour. To date, the big problem with your otherwise cool mag is that it's been somewhat po-faced.

Pedro Gann

Er, thanks. Did you hear the one about the...

Am I the only gamer who has noticed how little inflation seems to have affected our hobby? Think back: around ten years ago when Avalon Hill launch the 2nd edition *RuneQuest*, it was £20. Now, in 1996, it's the same price. Amazing, eh?

Dr Ron Dengap

I recall a time when I was playing *Magic* with a friend and two Christians saw us (they were called Olivier and David). They were convinced we were communicating with the Devil using tarot cards. Maybe I should buy them a copy of *Kult*?

Shane Horan

Maybe that wouldn't be such a great idea, Shane.

Back to the heavy metal.

Shane Horan

That's not such a great idea either, really, is it?

← *second-hand shelves in your local games store, or maybe place a Wanted ad in the Reader Ads section of* **arcane**.

Dear arcane,

Yes, I have risen to the bait... Mr Real World (**arcane** Scribblings, issue 5) obviously does not understand the true concept of roleplaying. I have an exciting job, I've travelled a lot, I've seen it and done it and I've had an eventful life. And I play roleplaying games in all of their various forms, from LARP – violence with latex and leather – to PBM, with a fair amount of tabletop action thrown into the mix. All of the games I play are to some extent predictable and safe, but

"real life isn't predictable, far from it"

they're never boring; you know what's going to happen when you enter a village most of the time, but it's good fun playing it through none-the-less. Real life isn't predictable, far from it, and roleplaying games are a safe escape from this unpredictable world we live in. They are a means of relaxing and having a good time.

June Bowden, Manchester

We agree, June. Though we're somewhat worried about your ideas about live action roleplaying. Anyhow, that's the Real World debate closed, okay everyone?

Dear arcane,

May I comment on a point well presented. In the *Star Wars* CCG review in the April issue of **arcane**, Andy Butcher rightly pointed out the ridiculous state of affairs with this game (which I play and enjoy none-the-less) as regards rare and uncommon cards.

I have been playing it for about three months and I must have bought at least 15 Booster packs, and I don't have one of the main characters. This is at a cost of some £30 – I'd have years of amusement with almost any other game for that price.

As pointed out in the review, I have buckets of cards which are of little use, until I have got the exceedingly rare cards such as Obi-Wan or Darth Vader. Don't get me wrong, I think cards that utilise other cards are great, but I cant help but agree with your reviewer in that the

"I can see people losing their interest"

distribution is somewhat dodgy. Maybe if we hassle Decipher games enough they might give us a break and increase the likelihood of getting decent cards in forthcoming expansion sets, otherwise I can see people losing interest, or at least turning away due to the increasingly large hole being created in their pockets. I know I will.

Aside from that, I really enjoy this game – it is fun to play *Star Wars*, and the gameplay is smooth and varied. I am hoping to change the rules slightly, and try to come up with a new way of playing, mainly to allow players to more fully utilise the cards we have invested in.

Toby Allen, e-mail

I'm glad you agree with our review. So Decipher, are you listening? Change your rares and uncommons policy, please!

Dear arcane,

Okay, I'll make this letter short. The earliest fantasy miniature line I know of from the UK is the Minifigs Mythical Earth range from July 1973. Hinchcliffe Models had a John Carter from Mars range around the same time, but I'm not sure of the exact release date. Has anyone got any more information on other ranges at or before this time?

David Wood, Manchester

Can anyone help David with his quest to discover which was the earliest range of fantasy figures? Write to us at the usual address...

Dear arcane,

I'd like to contribute my thoughts on the long-running acting verses roleplaying debate...

The point is that the whole group is telling a story when roleplaying, not just the referee. The ref's job is to provide situations within which the characters can create an interesting story. In a way, she is like the director of a play, but with no final control over the actions of her players' characters. This doesn't mean that plots can't be complicated, however; unless the players have something which holds their interest, they'll give up and go home.

If the referee has a clear idea of what her *intended* plot is, then she can use this to get the players back on track should they go off the rails. If the referee knows what motivates her NPCs, then she can use these to limit the actions of the players. If they start to cause havoc throughout a game, have the NPCs knock them back into check. Refereeing is a matter of compromise: if you give the players something they find interesting, then they'll respect your story and more-or-less stick to it; if, on the other hand, you bore them silly with your scenarios, then you can expect nothing more than for them to rebel by having their characters attempt to branch away from the plot.

Chris Howcroft, Lincoln

Is this really a discussion of the place of acting within roleplaying, or the use of plot as a means of keeping players involved in the game (and persuading them not to deviate from the pre-defined plot)?

I think too many referees get too caught up in ensuring players stick to a plot. The majority of roleplaying sessions I've run where players drift away from the written scenario have turned out to be hugely enjoyable. The most interesting campaign I've ever run (using a game by the name of ***Living Steel****), didn't have any plot at all – I just presented the players with an initial situation and let them get on with it. This style of play may seem daunting at first, but stick with it, and it becomes easier for the ref' – there's less background work involved.*

arcane On-line

Misunderstood AD&D player seeks similar for meaningful conversation, refereeing tips and game maps... This month, Karen Levell plays matchmaker for lonely gamers.

arcane
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arcane (a:'kein) adj. requiring secret knowledge to be understood; esoteric. [C16: from L. arcānus secret, from arcere to keep safe]

Check out the arcane forums on Futurenet for more debate, reader contacts and ads.

Hello and welcome!

Sad, Satanic and strange. Let's face it, most people haven't got a clue what roleplaying's really about, but they still love to give it a label. You can go into any pub and talk about football or *Eastenders*, but mention roleplaying games and your drinking partners begin to frown, drum their fingers and generally edge away from the bar. You know the problem...

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So, how do you go about finding this oracle of gaming knowledge? How can you join this fellowship of kindred spirits? Well, it's easy. Just boot up your computer, log on to the Internet and point your browser at `http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html`.

arcane On-line – which is run as part of FutureNet, Europe's most popular commercial Web site – is full of the kind of RPG information you've come to expect from the UK's finest roleplaying mag. More than that, though, its forums give you a chance to swap information with other gamers, make new contacts and just shoot the breeze with like-minded people.

Over the coming months we'll also be adding an up-to-the minute news service, as well as a database of game system reviews so that you know what you'll be letting yourself in for before you decide to buy or join a new game.

arcane On-line is growing all the time. Isn't it about time you paid it a visit?

Karen Levell, On-line editor
klevell@futurenet.co.uk

Debates rage about all manner of RPG-related issues on the arcane forum. Here's a taster of what's going on out there.

On the topic of female roleplaying...

I have heard more reports of women ganging up on the men, than the other way round. Sexism was shot dead long ago. Now women are the stronger sex. If you watch women in roleplaying and analyse what they do, they use their feminism to twist and manipulate the men.

This is not just the women that I know... it has happened in many other games too, and good luck to them.

As for women being raped in games, if it's going to happen, it will happen. I had a group of blokes playing and two of them had female characters. One of the 'females' got a bit lippy so they sold her to a whore house. Characters do things to characters - it is only a game.

It works both ways, and in a society where women are becoming a driving factor, men make the sexist comments (or think them) but really the women get the upper hand in the end.

Cybersooty
http://www.reading.ac.uk/~ssu95ril/

Yes, it is only a game. Yes, characters do things to characters, but players should also try to play in character. I regularly play in two games with a female who plays female characters. From my experience, women play females better than men. All the blokes I've ever gamed with who have played female characters just lark around, ruining the atmosphere of the game.

A lot of the time, if there is a female playing it brings an attitude of restraint to the game. Players will usually be more serious, and I generally enjoy the game more.

I am not sexist.

Benn Gunn
belmam@eee.rgu.ac.uk

The only valid comments concerning female roleplayers are from a) women, or b) men who have roleplayed with women. All else is speculation.

I can only speak from the experience I have had in a group with one female player. I am not sure what effect being outnumbered has had on her, but she can roleplay with the same degree of skill as any of the male players. She has played both male and female characters, but I don't think she makes any specific modifications to her roleplaying based on gender, which may be a mistake.

For the most part, the males of my group don't say anything to offend her. 'Character rape' has never happened. In fact, the prospect is so degrading that I would eject the offending player from the game!

All in all, I see no reason why roleplaying should be a 'boys' club'.

Jwebber@pop.erols.com

I'd like to point this discussion towards an article I wrote in *Interactive Fiction 4*, 'The Circle Stands Unbroken'. It's an overview of some of the reasons why more women don't roleplay. Comments are invited!

I'd like to add two points to this article, which are coming up frequently:

(1) Gender 'styles' are not universal - not all women play in a 'feminine' style, and so on. However, it's a useful generalisation to make.

(2) Gender differences are strongest for novice roleplayers, and tend to get evened out with experience.

I'm in the process of writing a second article, based on a survey, and I am also building up links with people who are also interested in doing some 'research' into this area. If you want to get involved, get in touch!

Martin

M.J.Oliver@open.ac.uk

What you need to get on-line

*To access **arcane** On-line on Futurenet – and the whole Internet, for that matter – you need the following bits and pieces:*
A computer (PC, Mac, Amiga, etc), a telephone line (your household line is fine), a modem (14,400 baud or 28,800 baud is best), and an Internet account (try Demon on 0181 371 1000 – they provide a good, cheap service).

free reader ads

Buying or selling a game? Advertising or looking for a club or other roleplayers? Conventions? Fanzines? Strange messages to your friends? It's all here in the reader ads...

games for sale

● *AD&D 2nd Ed* rules and supplements for sale. Too many to list. Also *Torg, Warhammer*, etc. Call Brian 01955 603842 evenings

● *Dragon Dice* Dragonlord die for sale. Still in original packaging. Offers to Gael, 13 Hillside Avenue, Silverstone, Northants NN12 8UR

● Large RPG sale! Send SAE for list. N Tupman, 9 Hillside Close, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 2DW Cheers!

● Massive unpainted Citadel undead army with rules. Worth £380, sell for £80 ono. Contact Adam 01676 533119 (evenings)

● *Rolemaster 2nd Edition* + approx 30 supplements £40, 300+ piece Skaven army £150, *TMNT* rules £3, loads more. Dave 01279 452040 for list

● Sale! RPGs and supplements. *AD&D, Traveller, Earthdawn* and more! Phone John for list 01689 891476 evenings only

● *Warhammer 40,000* plus supplements and large Space Marine and Eldar army. £150 ono. Phone Niall 0129 2315465 for details

● *World at War* new PBM of diplomacy, politics and warfare in the early 20th century. Phone Robbie 01463 225942

cards for sale

● *Legend of Five Rings* and *Illuminati* cards for sale. Reasonable prices. Contact Adam 01676 533119 evenings for details

● *M:TG* collection. 2,300 cards and international collector's edition set– £270 ono. Alan 01792 419858

● *Magic* cards for sale. Write to 120 Jendale, Sutton Park, Hull or email Tony-_Marshall@metnet.demon.co.uk

wanted

● Anyone remember the RPG *Aftermath*, 1979 or early 1980s, or anything similar? Phone Mik evenings 0121 778 6397

● Any sci-fi RPGs, post-apocalypse RPGs. Also 25mm miniatures related to sci-fi. Phone Mik evenings on... 0121 778 6397

● *Armoured Assault Space Master* supplement desperately wanted. Cash paid. Call Paul evenings or weekends on 01689 839765.

● *Blockmania* and *Megamania* boxed games wanted. Multiple copies required. Also spare counters, boards etc. Phone Paul 0191 2401811

● *Cyberpunk 2020* information exchange. NPCs, PCs, tech, maps, scenarios wanted in exchange for similar materials. Call Mike 01394 670068

● Does anyone have *Top Secret TSI* by TSR? Phone Wai-Gong Lee on 01179 774960 (Bristol area) Desperately wanted!

● Games Workshop *Epic* stuff: *Titan Legions, Space Marine* etc. Also miniatures. Phone Mik evenings 0121 778 6397

● Looking for a copy of Games Workshop's *Mighty Empires*. Paul Harrison, 3 Church Rd, Watton, Thetford, Norfolk IP25 6DQ 01953 885978

● *Magic* – buy, trade OOPS rares. Also art and/or atlas *Dragonlance* vgc. Tel Nigel 016973 32128 after 6pm

● *Rage/Umbra/Wyrm* card lists. Will also trade these cards. Contact Andy, 13 Albright House, Kempsey Close, Oldbury B69 1EY

● *Shadowrun Downtown Militarized Zone* and *GURPS 3rd Edition*. Will pay reasonable/good prices. Call Ben 01203 593923

● *Timemaster* (*Pacesetter*) *Basic Set* in good condition. Call Chris Halliday 01203 715549

● Wanted – *Return of the Jedi* collectable cards. 25p for commons, £1 for foils, or will swap for *M:TG* cards. Phone Colin on 01733 706315

● Wanted – any robot board or card games. Also any unmade *Robotech* or *Macross* models/toys. Contact Stephen 0141 3574865

● Wanted – Steve Jackson *GURPS Illuminati* game. Will pay reasonable price. Call Phil 01792 585395 after 6pm

clubs

● Club in Epsom, Surrey needs 1-2 serious roleplayers. Wide variety of games, *AD&D* mostly. Phone Simon 01372-811205

This reader ad in arcane 4 got six enquiries immediately after publication. The club meets on Wednesdays and is hoping to expand even further

● Alternative Realities, Eastbourne's premier games club. Monday nights 7–10pm. Contact Jarec 01323 500624 email jarec@cix.compulink.co.uk

● BADW meet Wednesday evenings at Bragbury End, Stevenage, for roleplaying, wargaming etc. Contact Jane Williams 01438 367799

● Birmingham Central Roleplayers. Thursdays 7.30. Ladywood Community Centre. Bar. Over 16s. About £1 a night. Steve Jones 0121 5857263

● Black Country RPS' Dudley Bug Ball was held on 27th April. Advertised in **arcane** reader ads, it attracted 110 delegates and raised £278 for Action Heart – a local charity serving heart attack victims. A larger event is planned for the same weekend next year.

● Black Country RPS. Thu 7.30. Waterfall Inn, Waterfall Lane, Blackheath, W Mids. All ages and games. 70p a night. Steve Turner 01384 235244

● Brentwood Roleplay Club. Thurs 7–10pm, Sherwood House in Highwood Hospital Grounds. £1 a night. All ages. Turn up!

● Doncaster Roleplaying Guild meet Sundays, 7pm at British Sub-aqua Club, Greyfriars Rd, behind St George's Church

● Dragons on the Hill. Now residing at the Castle, Furnival Street, London EC4. Age 18+, Wednesdays, 7pm+, upper room

● *Elemental Lords* LRP based in Worcester; a fantasy game of magic, mayhem and monsters. Contact Paul 01905 425672

● Established veteran RPG group seeks fresh input. Glasgow area. Own transport useful, not essential. Contact David 0141 6384170

● Exeter University Games Society meets Sundays from 2pm in the Cornwall House Refectory, Exeter University Campus

● Fantasy/Vampire LRP, Derby/ Nottingham. Contact Martin Lee 08501 89892

● Fomoria LRP in darkest Dorset! Overland sites, latex weapons, fully costumed, experienced monsters, beginners welcome. Darren 01725 517322

● Glasgow University Gaming Society meets Thurs 5pm, Queen Margaret Union, University Gardens. Term time only. Non-students welcome

● Guild of Melee and Magic – Central London Branch. Mons RPGs, Tues CCGs, Weds wargames. 5–11pm. Westmoreland Arms, 34 George St W1 – Jason 0181 7158675

● Guild of Melee and Magic – East London Branch. Thurs 7–11pm. Bow Bells, Bow Rd, London E2 – Douglas 0181 5535332

● Guild of Melee and Magic – London's biggest club. First visit free, annual membership £5. Contact Jason on 0181 7158675 for information

● Guild of Melee and Magic – South London Branch. Sundays 2–7pm. Greyhound, Sydenham Rd, Sydenham SE19 – Jon 0181 6999654

● Guild of Melee and Magic – West London Branch. Sats 2–7, Northfields Community Centre, North Croft Rd, Northfields W16 Gerald 0181 7239008

● Help! We are trapped inside *The Amazing Spider-Man*! Haverhill Games Club. Will play anything. Phone Bob 01440 712910

● Inverness Roleplaying and Wargaming Association meets Railway Club (upstairs) Mondays, 6–10pm. Fee: £1.20. First night free.

● *IOW, Masquerade, Vampire*, LARP meetings every other Sunday, Newport Youth Centre, 7.15pm. Details 01983 528758 Nigel. New members wanted

● Leatherhead Games Club. Small group meets Mondays in Leatherhead. Currently running *Earthdawn* campaign. Interested? Jef on 01372 375202

● *Magic: The Gathering, Star Wars & Star Trek*. Join our playing group in Bristol. Call 0117 9721701

● Mid-Surrey Games Club meets 2–3 times weekly and welcomes new members – players and DMs. Most RPGs played. All ages. Scott 01932 865308

● Portsmouth, Tuesdays, *Ars Magica* campaign and other RPGs, alternate weeks, 20s–40s. SOH. DMs welcome. Ring Ian 01705 240101

● Reading Roleplaying Association. Near town centre. 18+ please: licensed premises. Bar available. Ring Brian on 01734 816195

● Renegade roleplaying club starting again soon in Ilford, Essex area. Over 16s. If interested contact Mark on 0181 4915382

● Roleplayers of Chester. Weds, 7.30–late. Chester Rail Club, Lightfoot St,

reader ads

Chester. Contact Ged 01244 314435 or Greg 01606 883698

● Roleplayers wanted. No trained killers. Meet in Irvine, Ayrshire. Play most RPGs, *Vampire* etc. Phone David on 01294 275267

● Roleplaying & games club, Thursdays 6.30pm–10.00pm. The Parkhouse Centre, Bude, Cornwall. For more details ring 01288 355612

● RPGA Network Roleplaying Club. New members welcome. Sunday afternoons 1.45pm, 2nd Arnold Scout HQ, Calverton Rd, Arnold, Nottingham

● Small roleplaying group seeks new players in Felixstowe area. 16+. Wide variety of games played. Call Paul 01394 276975

● Sword & Sorcery LRP in Manchester area. Contact 'Nemesis' 0161 7476905 or write to 2 Whitegates Rd, Cheadle SK8 1EA

● The Dark Door Club runs *Cthulhu*-esque LRP adventures. For information contact P. Hardy, 32 Park Hall Road, London SE21 8DW

contacts

● *Nephelim* GM seeks players (French scenarios in English). Only over 17s. Central London location. Contact Jonathan 0171 3510470

Jonathan has found some players now and will launch a campaign after his exams. Further enquiries still welcome

● 15 year old *AD&D* player seeks fellow gamers in the Portsmouth area. Please, please contact me soon. Stuart 01705 610901

● 30-year-old seeks group/individuals, Matlock/Cromford area. Can ref at a push. Phone Gary 01629 826112

● *40K* and *Warhammer* players wanted. Tunbridge Wells area. Please contact Anthony Burgess, 33 Leeves Close, Heathfield TN21 0AW

● 'Ancient' gamer (34) without transport: *CoC, GURPS, Star Trek, Cyberpunk,* requires others to resurrect himself. Call Chris 01703 211237

● Appreciators of all things imaginary contact 'The Dead Duet' to form group into fantasy/sci-fi. 22 Tormead, Hythe, Southampton 01703 849842

● Are there any LRPers of *Vampire: The Masquerade* (or others?) in the Birmingham area? Phone Danny 0121 4782163

● Cheltenham group seeks players (18+) for *AD&D/Shadowrun.* Other games considered. Contact Joe on 01242 226648 after 6pm

● Complete novice (early 20s) seeks local RPG group. Taunton area. Will travel. Neil 01823 353681

● Dublin gamers seek fresh talent, players with an open mind willing to play RPGs and LARPs. Contact Jason Hickey 01 2801097

● Female, 25+ (Doncaster area) wants to roleplay again. Can you help? Contact Jane. Tel 01302 881346

● GM/player seeks sensible RPG groups in Bexhill area. I hate hack 'n' slash. Call James 0973914004

● Having trouble setting up a successful club? Contact Jason at the Guild of Melee and Magic – 0181 7159675

● Looking for *AD&D* players in the Carlisle area. Phillip Harrison, 2 Parham Grove, Belle Vue, Carlisle, Cumbria CA2 7RW. Aged 17+

● *M:TG* and Games Workshop players wanted in Horsham, West Sussex area. Contact Paul (aged 15) on 01403 733433

● Novice and limboed *AD&D* player would like to start a roleplaying group in Bristol/Chew Valley area. Jon 01761–452766

● Player/GM seeks other players in local area. Contact Andy at 13 Albright House, Kempsey Close, Oldbury B69 1EY

● Players wanted for fantasy and sci-fi postal RPGs. Please contact Paul Baldowski, 93 Newark Drive, Corby, Northants NN18 0HA

● Players/Storytellers wanted for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse,* and maybe other RPGs. Medway area. Contact Neal 01634 719194

● *Rage, Magic, Blood Bowl*! 13-year-old player needs somebody to play with. Nicholas Gunn, Laverstock, Salisbury 01722 337382

● Smallish gaming group wishes to start club. Needs players, DMs. Tameside area. Contact Alan 0161 3082053

● Writers and artists wanted for new SF/fantasy magazine. SAE to 39 Stoneyfield Road, Old Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 2HP, UK

fanzines

● *Role Call* – A4 fanzine for console RPGs (*FFIII* etc.). 4 issues available £1.20 or £7 sub (6 issues). Rachel Ryan 01925 490910

Since this ad first appeared in arcane 4, Role Call seems to have turned the corner. After ten months and six issues, it now has over 100 subscribers, with new interest every day.

● Discover play-by-mail games! 40-page fanzine £1.75. Cheques payable to 'Jamie Lang', 53 Scott Road, Sheffield S4 7BG

● *Entity,* the skiffy fanzine. Fiction, PBM. Send 40p and SSAE to Entity, Old Barn, Hundley Way, Charlbury OX7 3QE

● New fanzine. *RAGE!* It covers RPGs, PBMs, CCGs, sci-fi & lots of other stuff. Tel 01291 421105 Peter

● *Warpstone* – the *Warhammer* FRP fanzine. £1 from John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5

● Writers and artists wanted for new SF/fantasy magazine. SAE to 39, Stoneyfield Road, Old Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 2HP – UK

messages

Allen the Snotling found in Norfolk. Please report any further sightings

This message arrived anonymously but, using our super-sleuth skills, we managed to track down the sender and tried to quiz him on the identity of Allen the Snotling. He remained, however, quite tight-lipped. Maybe we wierded him out

● Jack, join me in DC to celebrate. Just got promoted to new intelligence section. Agent CI-0015. Passionately – Storm

other stuff

● Clan Amber, a residential *Amber* RPG convention in Edinburgh. 8–10 Nov. Contact Nicky Cannon 70/5 Craighouse Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 5UN

● Fantasy/SF figure painting service. Award winning artist. Send SAE to Paul, 27 Diamond Street, York YO3 7LH

● Toshiba laptop, colour, 210Mb, 8Mb RAM. Canon printer BJ10SX, accesories, softwares, call Richard 0141 9462279 or email 9405086p@mech.gla.ac.uk

● UK gamers list. Send SAE with details to Ross, 369 Broomhead Drive, Dunfermline KY12 9AG

● Write to Trevannion House, Cardrew Lane, Redruth, Cornwall for free RPG by mail! Leave address. Ten players needed.

● Want to see your ad appear here? Then fill in that form below and send it in!

Please place my free ad under the following heading

- ☐ Games for sale
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June 1996

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Name _____

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SEND TO: arcane READER ADS, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BEAUFORD COURT, BATH BA1 2BW

IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS

by TB Falsename Episode Two

PREVIOUSLY ON "IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS":

Princess Breasts, Ash and Inspector Petit-Pivic, ambushed by the army of Grimsaxhaibailak on its way to invade Akansaxchukabuk, have been propelled into a realm of slack grammar by the maajikcke of General Redmax.

Meanwhile, atop the umbrella factory, we find the sinister secret headquarters of the rascally Penguin and his fine feathered finks.

Now read on.

(Scene: An unfocused face. Gradually the face resolves into Princess Breasts'. Reverse angle shows groggy Ash.)

ASH: The last I remember is a crushing gerundial ennui. How could we possibly have survived?

PRINCESS: I realised in the nick of time it's the fluidity of a language that keeps it alive. Of course, that still leaves us in an impassable wasteland. And Petit-Pivic's in a bad way. *(She indicates the Inspector lying whey-faced under a blanket.)* She tried to maintain the relevancy of 'art' as a second person singular present indicative of 'to be.' *(She gently strokes the Inspector's brow.)* The poor crazy kid.

ASH *(scanning the bleak horizon)*: It must be weeks to the nearest village.

PRINCESS: General Redmax's army was practically at the gates of Akansaxchukabuk. My people are lost.

ASH: I think you're underestimating Captain Raxinfraxin and Dixdastardlax. They may be double-crossing jackals, but this is a matter of civic pride.

(Cut to besieged Akansaxchukabuk. Night. Flames leap all around. Crane down to Captain Raxinfraxin and Dixdastardlax rallying townspeople.)

RAXINFRAXIN: We must put aside our differences and fight the common foe.

DIXDASTARDLAX: He's right. Let's co-operate. *(To eager baker.)* No, we've no time for pie, ma'am. Attack, men! Let's win one for the old Acker.

(A great shout. The people surge from the square.)

RAXINFRAXIN *(waving them off with a fixed grin)*: I'll settle with you afterwards, treacherous swine.

DIXDASTARDLAX *(clapping him across the shoulders)*: And I with you, filthy squirrel.

(A moment, then Raxinfraxin breaks off waving to back-punch Dixdastardlax in the face. The wizard tumbles over the battlements.)

RAXINFRAXIN: Oh no! What a terrible accident! *(He turns to look, revealing a Shoot Me sign pinned to his back. A rock bounces off his head. Cut back to plain.)*

ASH: But what of us? We haven't even any supplies.

PRINCESS: Wait – Petit-Pivic has a bag of nourishing military-issue strawberry energy sweets.

ASH: Oh, not strawberry.

PRINCESS: Well, help us! You're a wood spirit – can't you, I don't know, snap your fingers and transport us all to the divine house of the gods, or something?

ASH *(knuckling forehead)*: I can't believe it. How could I have forgotten? Sorry. *(Snaps fingers. Flash of light.)*

(Cut to heavenly road leading to divine house of the gods. Two deities walk along conversing animatedly; a third scuffs behind them sullenly.)

GOD OF LOVE: You'll like it, Friar Crosby. All do.

FRIAR: It's a great honour. I'd always just thought of it as my duty to help others.

GOD OF LOVE: You're too modest. Do you know you're the first saint to attain godhood in 500 years?

FRIAR: Yes – I am a god, after all. Ha ha!

GOD OF LOVE: Ha ha! Come on, Hope, we'll be late.

GOD OF HOPE: Oh, what's the point?

(Blinding flash. Ash, Princess Breasts and Inspector Petit-Pivic plummet into shot, crushing the gods.)

PRINCESS: Petit-Pivic's made a miraculous recovery.

ASH *(gloomily)*: Happens all the time around here.

PETIT-PIVIC: I've had such a funny episode.

ASH *(after a beat)*: I'm not exactly welcome among the gods at the moment. *(Rubs chin.)* This requires trickery.

(Cut to gates of divine house of the gods. The party approaches, disguised in the crushed deities' robes.)

GATEKEEPER: Who walks the road to utopia?

ASH: Hope.

PETIT-PIVIC: Crosby.

PRINCESS: The spirit of love.

GATEKEEPER: Right, in you go then.

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